The

AMERICAN SCHOLAR

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A 70TH ANNIVERSARY CHRESTOMATHY

NO STEP
Nicholson Baker

MENDELEEV'S GARDEN
Oliver Sacks

THE PUBLIC INTELLECTUAL
Anthony Grafton

HAPPY TRAILS TO ALL
James McConkey

GETTING AND SPENDING
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LOVE'S WOUND, LOVE'S SALVE
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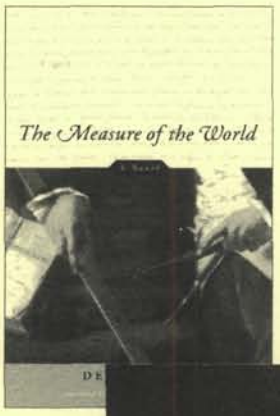

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Denis Guedj

Translated by Arthur Goldhammer

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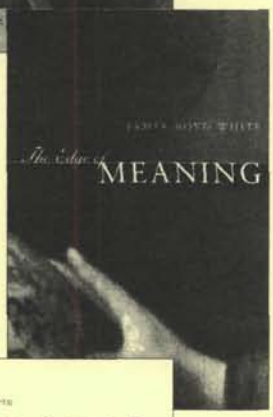

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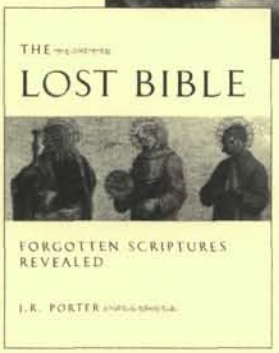

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The

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—RALPH WALDO EMERSON, "The American Scholar," 1837

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The Long View

Two decades ago, when The American Scholar turned fifty, its editors noted on this page that it had been born "during the bleakest days of the worst depression this country has ever known, and its founding, by Phi Beta Kappa, marks an act of extraordinary optimism." It is hard to imagine launching a journal in such a climate, and as the Scholar turned seventy, we planned this issue, which includes many of our favorite writers, as a tribute to our mettlesome founders—and to the readers who proved them right.

We never dreamed that it would come out at an even bleaker time in this country's history. When the terrorists struck on September 11, our issue, aside from this page, was at the printer. Numb, we did what editors do in a crisis—started thinking about the *next* issue and telephoning writers. The results of those calls will be published in our Winter issue, much of which will be devoted to the shadows cast by the catastrophe.

At times like this—have there been times like this?—it may be helpful to take the long view. I have found it sustaining to reread the seventieth-anniversary Chrestomathy that begins on page 11, a gathering of excerpts from Scholar essays published in each decade from the '30s to the '00s. Many reflect the responses of articulate thinkers to earlier crises: the Great Depression, totalitarianism, World War II, McCarthyism, Vietnam, Watergate. *Chrestomathy* means a selection of literary passages, but its root is the Greek word *khrēstos*, useful.

John T. Bethell, our senior editor, spent weeks combing back issues in search of material for the Chrestomathy, which he designed and edited. When he showed it to me, I read through the roll call of names that runs beneath his selections and remembered my first visit to the Scholar's offices in Washington, just before I became editor. I wandered into a back room rimmed with dusty cardboard boxes containing every issue the Scholar had ever published. Picking up a brittle copy on whose spine were printed the words "Vol. I • No. I," I sat on the floor next to the Xerox machine, turned to the contents page, and was overwhelmed by the length and breadth of the legacy I was inheriting. Perhaps, seventy years from now, another new editor will sit on the Scholar's floor, open this issue to the Chrestomathy, and be overwhelmed when she reads the words of Van Doren and Mead and Kazin. It comforts me to imagine that scene, for in these sad days, when even tomorrow seems uncertain, the past's long view may help orient us toward a similarly long view of the future.

A. F.

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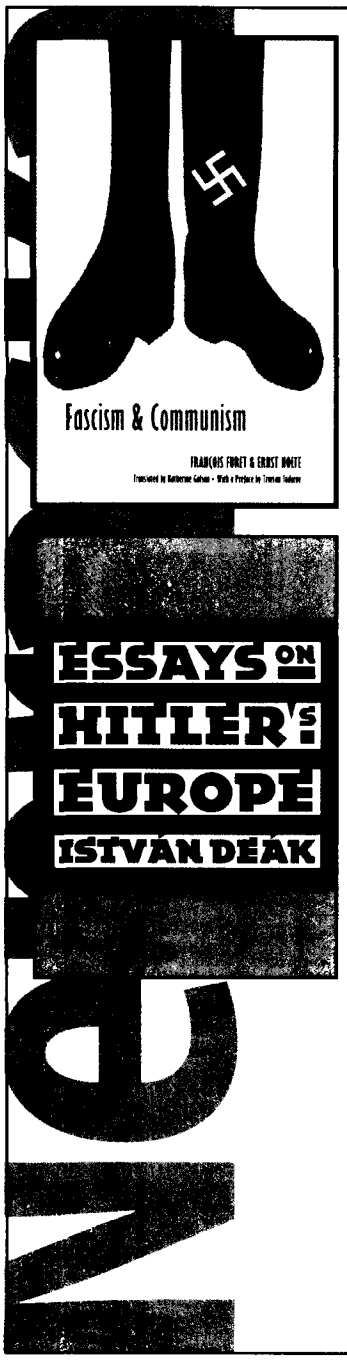

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AT LARGE AND AT SMALL

No Step

NICHOLSON BAKER

In 1994, I took a nap on an airplane. On waking, I pushed up the oval window shade and looked outside. The window was surprisingly hot to the touch: incoming sunlight had bounced off the closed shade, heating it up. And the wing looked hot, too, like something you would use to press a shirt. But it wasn't hot; volumes of freezing wind were flowing over and under it—invisibly wispy, top-of-Mount-Everest wind. I was so close to the wing, closer than any other passenger, and yet unable to determine for myself, by touch, what temperature it was. Would my finger stick to it?

The plane turned, so that the long sickle shape of sun-dazzle slid from the wing and fell to earth; and then, in the shadow of the fuselage, dozens of Phillips-head screws appeared, like stars coming out in an evening sky. Some of these wing screws surrounded a stenciled message, which I read. The message was: WARNING WET FUEL CELL DO NOT REMOVE.

A few months later, on a Boeing 757, I was given a window seat with an excellent view of the right engine. The engine was painted a dark glossy blue; it hung below the wing, shiny and huge, bobbling a little in the turbulence, like a large breast or a horse's testicle. There was a message on the engine. HOIST POINT, it said.

In April of 1996 I looked out directly over another wing. Its leading edge was made of shiny naked metal, but the middle of the wing had been painted a pinky beige color. The painted part looked like a path—and because the wing tapered, the edges of the path angled in and converged at the far end, so that it seemed by a trick of perspective to extend for miles, disappearing finally at the blue horizon. If I climbed out the window and set off down that path, I'd have to walk carefully at first, with my knees bent to steady myself against the rush of the wind, which would otherwise flip me off into the void. But I would get my wind-legs soon enough. When I was a quarter of a mile down the wing, I'd turn and wave at the passengers. Then, shrugging my rucksack higher on my shoulders, I would set off again.

There were no words for me on that wing. But on the return flight I got a seat farther forward in the cabin, near the left engine. This engine said: CAUTION RELEASE UPPER FWD LATCH ON R.H. AND L.H. COWL BEFORE OPERATING. And it said: WARNING STAND CLEAR OF HAZARD AREAS WHILE ENGINE IS RUNNING. The hazard areas were diagrammed on a little picture. It was not difficult to heed this warning, since the areas were all out in empty space. I spent a long time looking at the engine. It was an impassive object, a dead weight—part of the problem, not part of the solution. You know when propellers are turning, because you can see them turn; but this piece of machinery gave no sign that it was what was shot-putting us forward through the sky.

Usually I don't become interested in the wing until the plane has taken off. Before that there are plenty of other things to look at—the joking baggage handlers pulling back the curtain on the first car of a three-car suitcase train; the half-height service trucks lowering their conveyors; the beleaguered patches of dry grass making a go of it between two

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Nicholson Baker's books include *Vox*, *The Mezzanine*, and, most recently, *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper*. He writes the SCHOLAR's "At Large and At Small" column each autumn.

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runways; the drooped wind sock. As you turn onto the runway, you sometimes get a glimpse of it stretching ahead, and sometimes you can even see the plane that was in line ahead of you dipping up, lifting its neck as it begins to grab the air. Before the forward pull that begins a takeoff, the cabin lights and air pressure come on, as if the pilot has awakened to the full measure of his responsibility; and then, looking down, you see the black tire marks on the asphalt sliding past, traces of heavier than usual landings. (It still seems faintly worrisome that the same runway can be used for takeoffs and landings.) Some of the black rubber marks are on a slight bias to the straightaway, and there are more and more of them, a sudden crowding of what looks like Japanese calligraphy, and then fewer again as you heave past the place where most incoming planes land. And sometimes there are fat yellow lines that swoop into and join the center yellow line of your runway, like the curves at the end of LP records. And finally you're up: you may see a clump of service buildings, or a lake, or many tiny blue swimming pools, or a long straight bridge, and then you go higher until there is nothing but distant earth padded here and there with cloud. Then, out of a pleasant sort of loneliness, ignoring the person who is sitting next to you, you begin to want to get to know the wing and its engine.

In April of 1998, sitting in an emergency exit row on the way from San Francisco to Denver, I was surprised by how sharp-edged some mountains were. I was used to the blunt mountains of three-dimensional plastic topographical maps, which are pleasing to the fingertips. But real mountains would scrape your palm if you tried to feel them that way. I passed a salt lake, perhaps the Great Salt Lake, which had a white deposit on its edges like a chemistry experiment. And then I gave up on the world, and looked out at my new friend, the wing. It had nothing to say to me at first, no words that I could see; but then, when I put my head as close as I could to the window and looked down, I could make out two arrows. These were painted on a textured non-slip area near where the wing joined the fuselage. We passengers were not meant to see these arrows from our seats: they were there in case of a catastrophe, when we would hurry out the window and leap off the wing onto an inflatable rubber slide. How fast do you go down a slide? Fast enough to break a leg, I would think. I wouldn't want to leap onto that slide, but I like the arrows.

On the return from Denver, the wing, attached to an Airbus A-230, said DO NOT WALK OUTSIDE THIS AREA. The clouds were enormous flat-bottomed patties resting heavily on an ocean of low-pressure air. A few days after that, on a Boeing 767—one of the ones with the misdesigned call buttons that people press when they are trying to adjust the volume on their headphones, so that when the movie begins, the air is filled with unintended dinging calls for flight attendants—I had, just after takeoff, a quick, pleasing view of the neighborhood where I lived, visible just above the lump of the left engine, whose crest bore the words NO STEP. We rose higher. *NO STEP.* Never would I step. Never would anyone I know step. We were just peanut-chewing passengers locked inside our silver safe five miles in the air, breathing our own repressurized exhalations, staring yearningly out through the window at the rarefied frigidity on the other side. (It was a double-paned window; tiny inner fronds of frost were growing near a leaky seal.) Out on the wing, faint wind-wear lines streaked like aurora borealises from behind one of a group of eight little flat-head screws. I wanted to ride the wing, and I never would.

By 1999 I had become a collector of wing language. Boeing 757s said: HOIST POINT SLEEVE ONLY, and THRUST REVERSE ACTUATOR ACCESS, and LEAVE 3 INCH MAXIMUM GAP BETWEEN FAIRINGS PRIOR TO SLIDING AFT AND LATCHING, and SAFETY LINE ATTACH POINT. I noted these cautions down on folded pieces of paper, with arrows pointing out which words were in red paint and which in white. It was a pleasure to ride in McDonnell Douglas planes, because they were less common and offered different messages. Once when I was in an emergency exit row in an McDonnell Douglas MD-80, there were two pilots seated behind me. "This is an old plane," one of the pilots said, "but it's got new engines—you can hear the new engines." I listened for the note of

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newness in the engines but wasn't sure that I could hear it. On the wing there was an irregular area bounded with red paint, with NO STEP commands around the inside, and then in the middle it said ELECTRIC HEATER BLANKET 110 VOLTS.

In April of 1999 I rode a little propeller plane called a Dash 8 to Seattle. The window looked out below the wing, leaving the spindly landing gear, projecting from below the engine, visible from my seat, as if I were looking at someone's legs from under the dinner table. I watched the wheels as we began the surge down the runway, to see whether the tires (there were two tires on each side) would change shape visibly at the moment of liftoff. They didn't, but the moment was marked by a sudden extension of the greased piston of the shock absorber, and by the appearance of the tire's crisp shadow against the asphalt. Then came a small surprise: the wheels kept turning, fast, as we rose a few hundred feet, and then the wheel struts folded and disappeared into the under-nacelle, and, with the wheels still going, the carapace flaps closed.

When the plane descended an hour later, I watched our shadow coming into focus on the blur of the skid-marked ground; and when the now-motionless tire first touched the runway there was a beautiful puff of white smoke before it began to turn. As we drove to the gate, the rubber showed its whitish burned patch over and over; it was almost worn away by the time we reached the gates. I was so interested in the wheel struts and the smoke puff that I failed to copy down the messages on the engine. Later, though, when I rode a Dash 8 propeller plane again, I recorded this from the engine cowling: WARNING HYDRAULIC SERVICES MAY OPERATE / CLEAR PERSONNEL FROM RUDDER FLAPS AND LANDING GEAR DOORS BEFORE CONNECTING.

The words NO STEP are everywhere now. On an Airbus A330 this past March, I saw NO STEP NO LIFT NO STEP NO LIFT running like a decorative border along the riveted hill that covers the structure that holds the engine to the airplane. The engine itself said CAUTION / PRESS HERE ON LATCH TO ENSURE LOCKING, and there was a little set of gills next to which were the words FAN COMPARTMENT VENT AIR INTAKE. I copied down the cautionary words and then walked the aisles and galleys until I reached the curtain beyond which was the first-class cabin. Parting the curtain, I saw a man's shoulder, and beyond it, a small china plate on which there had been a bunch of grapes. Now the grapes were gone, but the firework display of green spent stems was there. I walked back down the coach-class aisle, allowing my eye to fall on the tableaus of sleeping passengers, each of whom arranged his or her blue blanket a different way. I kept thinking I was getting close to my row, but I wasn't—instead there was someone in a black sweater asleep with her head on a bunched blue blanket. I was one whole cabin section off, I realized. And then I saw a magazine with a clear plastic protective cover angled over a file folder, and the back of one of my shoes just visible on the floor. I was home. I slid into the window seat and looked outside. The window was cool to the nose. The engine, my engine, was still out there, toiling away, as inanimate and companionable as a thermos bottle. NO STEP, it said.

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5–8 A.M. Rise, wash, and address Powerful Goodness; contrive Day's Business and take the Resolution of the Day; prosecute the present study; and breakfast?—

8–12 A.M. Work.

12–2 P.M. Read, or overlook my Accounts, and dine.

2–6 P.M. Work.

6–9 P.M. Put Things in their Places, Supper, Musick, or Diversion, or Conversation, Examination of the Day.

9 P.M.–5 A.M. Sleep.

—BENJAMIN FRANKLIN,
Scheme of Employment for the Twenty-Four Hours of a natural Day
The Autobiography, *1771–1790*

It is superstitious to put one's hope in formalities, but pride to be unwilling to submit to them.

—BLAISE PASCAL,
Pensées, *number 249, 1670*

I will not tolerate the presence of yellow roses . . . which is sad because they're my favorite flower. I can't allow three cigarette butts in the same ashtray. Won't travel on a plane with two nuns. Won't begin anything on a Friday. It's endless, the things I can't and won't. But I derive some curious comfort from obeying these primitive concepts.

—TRUMAN CAPOTE,
interview in The Paris Review, *1956*

In bed he avoids lying in the posture of a corpse. When at home he does not use ritual attitudes. When appearing before anyone in mourning, however well he knows him, he must put on an altered expression, and when appearing before anyone in sacrificial garb, or a blind man, even informally, he must be sure to adopt the appropriate attitude. On meeting anyone in deep mourning he must bow across the bar of his chariot; he also bows to people carrying planks. When confronted with a particularly choice dainty at a banquet, his countenance should change and he should rise to his feet. Upon hearing a sudden clap of thunder or a violent gust of wind, he must change countenance.

—CONFUCIUS,
The Analects, *Book X, number 16 (c. 551–479 B.C.)*

COMMONPLACE BOOK

Ritual

COLLECTED BY
ANDRÉ BERNARD

After the duties of the day were over, [my men] would generally assemble on the forecastle, and, with violin and tambourine—and I always kept them supplied with these and other instruments—they would extemporize a ball-room, by moving the shot-racks, coils of rope, and other impediments, out of the way, and, with handkerchiefs tied around the waists of some of them, to indicate who were to be the ladies of the party, they would get up a dance with all due form and ceremony; the ladies, in particular, endeavoring to imitate all the airs and graces of the sex—the only drawback being a little hoarseness of the voice, and now and then the use of an expletive, which would escape them when something went wrong in the dance, and they forgot they had the aprons on.

—RAPHAEL SEMMES,
Memoirs of Service Afloat During the War Between the States, *1869*

In several species of so-called Empid Flies (in German very appropriately called *Tanzenfliegen*—Dancing Flies), closely related to the fly-eating Asalid Flies, a rite has developed as pretty as it is expedient. In this rite the male presents the female, immediately before copulation, with a slaughtered insect of suitable size. While she is engaged in eating it, he can mate her without fear of being eaten by her himself, a risk apparently threatening the suitors of fly-eating flies, particularly as the male is smaller than the female. Without any doubt, this menace exerted the selection pressure that has caused the evolution of this remarkable behavior.

—KONRAD LORENZ,
On Aggression, *1963*

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Not long since, the faithful of the church in Milan had begun to find mutual comfort and encouragement in the liturgy through the practice of singing hymns, in which everyone fervently joined with voice and heart. It was about a year earlier, or not much more, that Justina, mother of the boy-emperor Valentinian, had been persecuting your faithful Ambrose, in the interests of the Aryan heresy by which she had been led astray. His God-fearing congregation, prepared to die with their bishop, your servant, stayed up all night in church. Your maidservant, my mother, was among them, foremost in giving support and keeping vigil, and constant in her life of prayer. As for us, we were still cold, not being yet warmed by the fire of your Spirit, yet we too were stirred as alarm and excitement shook the city. It was then that the practice was established of singing hymns and psalms in the manner customary in regions of the East, to prevent the people losing heart and fainting from weariness. It has persisted from that time until the present, and in other parts of the world also many of your churches imitate the practice; indeed, nearly all of them.

—ST. AUGUSTINE,
The Confessions, *Book IX, c. 397–401 A.D.*

What a relief it was to hear the bells once more on Holy Saturday, what relief to wake up from the sleep of death with a triple "alleluia." Easter, that year, was as late as it could possibly be—the twenty-fifth of April—and there were enough flowers to fill the church with the intoxicating smell of the Kentucky spring—a wild and rich and heady smell of flowers, sweet and full. We came from our light, five hours' sleep into a church that was full of warm night air and swimming in this rich luxury of odors, and soon began that Easter invitatory that is nothing short of gorgeous in its exultation.

—THOMAS MERTON,
The Seven Storey Mountain, *1948*

At every exhibition game, right after the final out, before the fans had even begun to leave, the batting cage was wheeled out to home plate so that the players could get back to the business of getting in more licks. Nobody had to tell them, as so many people kept reminding me, that hitters have a failure rate of 70 percent. Up against such arithmetic, they are on an eternal quest to find an edge, however slight, in their classic duel with the pitcher, and it begins as soon as they arrive at spring training. Summer's reflexes have been dulled by fall and winter: the eye is a little off, the wrists are a little slow, the rhythms a little jerky. Only one process will put things right—hitting ball after ball after ball, rediscovering how pitches arrive at the plate in all their velocities and curves and dips, learning to relax, learning to *believe.*

—WILLIAM ZINSSER,
Spring Training, *1989*

During actual performances actors vary very much in their behavior. Some can play the fool while they are in the wings and then go on for a scene and immediately burst into tears, shriek with laughter, or fall dead, with complete conviction. Others must not be spoken to at the side of the stage. They like to be left alone in order to concentrate beforehand. Some go through their whole part in the dressing-room every night before going on. One learns to observe and respect such varying habits in one's colleagues while one is working with them.

—JOHN GIELGUD,
Stage Directions, *1963*

There is an inevitable ritual about serving and eating spaghetti. Sometimes when I have endured the pompous stewings and simmerings and scrapings and testings of an amateur chef's performance (for it can be called no less), I have felt that nothing at all would be preferable. But, fortunately for me, I like good spaghetti too well to forgo it.

M. F. K. FISHER,
An Alphabet for Gourmets, *1949*

Idleness is a disease which must be combated; but I would not advise a rigid adherence to a particular plan of study. I myself have never persisted in any plan for two days together.

—SAMUEL JOHNSON
Boswell's Life of Samuel Johnson, *1791*

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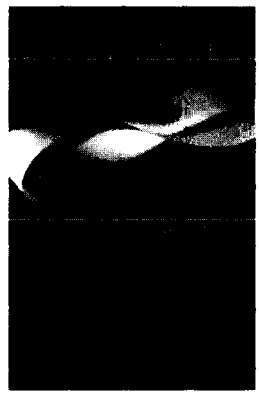

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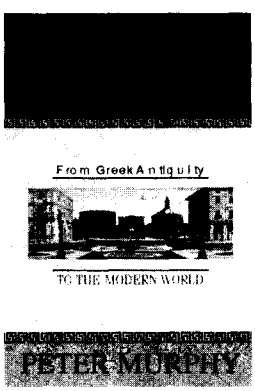

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Seventy Years of
THE AMERICAN SCHOLAR

A Chrestomathy

Founded by the United Chapters of Phi Beta Kappa in September 1931, the SCHOLAR is now beginning its eighth decade. The excerpts on these pages are drawn from the thousands of essays, reviews, and forums we've published over the past seventy years.

The 30s

PAYING THE PRICE

The man of educated sensibilities, whether conservative or radical, pays a big price for the blessings of democracy in widest commonalty spread. His room and his pullman berth must be overheated, his collars over-starched, his drink over-iced, his soup over-peppered, his food over-sweetened, the political oratory he hears over-eloquent, the after-dinner speeches over-humorous, his radio overburdened with trivial vulgarities, his college allegiance over-weighted with loyalties to the football team, his Sunday newspaper over-sized, his fiction over-sexed, his religion over-theologized or sensationalized. He is compelled to spell, punctuate, and employ synonyms in subservience to the taste or caprice of type-setters and proofreaders or the quorum of the faculty. False sentiment releases bandits on parole to make the streets unsafe for him, and false sentimentality spoils the potentially glorious art of the moving pictures. He is forced to stare at hideous, blatant advertisements from Washington to New York, on the outer lake-front drive of Chicago, and on every scenic road which he is taxed to construct from Florida to California. His sleep is broken by the loudspeaker in the neighboring flat.

— PAUL SHOREY,
"American Loyalties," Winter 1932

THE TALKIES

The great directors, from D. W. Griffith to Alfred Hitchcock, have never lost sight of the fact that the art of the movies is not a verbal art. Words have come in with the "talkies" but a decade of effort has so absorbed them into the primary function that they are no longer disturbing as they once were—and indeed the term "talkie" has ceased to be in common use. We still go to "movies" and can take the dialogue in our stride. The gloomy predictions

A full list of contributors to the SCHOLAR over the past seventy years would run to more than 2,700 names. Grouped by the decades in which their work first appeared, these essayists, critics, and poets make up about a tenth of that number. **The 30s:** William Rose Benét • Henry Steele Commager • Aaron Copland • W. E. B. DuBois • John Erskine • Dorothy Canfield Fisher • Christian Gauss • Alice Hamilton • Robert Maynard Hutchins • Howard Mumford Jones • George Lyman Kittredge • Harold Laski • Dwight Macdonald • Dumas Malone • Reinhold Niebuhr • Paul Shorey • Mark Van Doren

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that dialogue would kill the art have only their historical interest. . . . A silent picture of 1927 or 1928 was likely to be superior in sophistication to any talkie of 1931. Had not audiences been trained to interpret movement, gesture, change of scene and flutter of symbol—and to interpret these things with the eye alone? Sometimes we had to lean over and talk to our neighbors about what was going on. "He thinks she is behind the door." "That window was not open before; the burglar must have entered while the party was going on downstairs." "This is the girl who fainted at the factory." And so on. We can no longer indulge in such confidences. We must be as silent as the films themselves used to be.

— MARK VAN DOREN,
"Let the Movies Be Natural," Autumn 1937

WAR AND REVOLUTION

The outstanding feature of our time is insecurity. Epochs of this character—witness the Reformation and the French Revolution—have always been unfavorable to reason and tolerance; they have therefore been epochs in which dictatorship has its opportunity. And men always feel insecure when their privileges are challenged. They are not prepared to accept the invasion of their wonted routines. They seek to make their private claims universal rights; and those who provide them with the means of enforcing their claims are regarded as their saviors. The limits of men's faith in a reason which disturbs their established expectations are more narrow than they care to admit. Yet such disturbance always comes in an age of economic contraction. Whenever, historically, the economic forces of society cannot contain themselves within the political forms—as, once more, in the Reformation and the French Revolution—we have moved into an epoch of war and revolution.

— HAROLD J. LASKI,
"The Challenge of Our Times," Autumn 1939

The 40s

MODERN EDUCATION

It is said that since the invention of the steam engine we live in a new era, an era so different from all preceding ages that the cultural tradition is no longer relevant, is in fact misleading. I submit to you that this is a rationalization, that this is a pretended reason for the educational void which we now call education. The real reason, I venture to suggest, is that we reject the religious and classical heritage, first, because to master it requires more effort than we are willing to compel ourselves to make, and, second, because it creates issues that are too deep and too contentious to be faced with equanimity. We have abolished the old curriculum because we are afraid of it, afraid to face any longer in a modern democratic society the severe discipline and the deep, disconcerting issues of the nature of the universe, and of man's place in it and of his destiny.

— WALTER LIPPMANN,
"Education vs. Western Civilization," Spring 1941

A WORK IN PROGRESS

A Balinese village or palace court or temple has something of the quality of a sculptor's studio with its half-finished and just-begun statues standing about draped in wet cloths. Here a gateway is just receiving the finishing touches; there an old gateway, carved long ago, is finally sagging to the ground; somewhere else a third gate presents the solid crude surfaces of blocks of tufa which may not be carved for another twenty years. Nowhere does one find a dwelling unit or a temple which can be said to be complete, in perfect repair, and finished. In such a place a Balinese would feel uncomfortable; there would be nothing for the dozens of extra hands to do when three times too many people are gathered to prepare for a feast, no uncompleted work for

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The 40s: Dean Acheson • Jacques Barzun • Ruth Benedict • John Peale Bishop • Cleanth Brooks • Vannevar Bush • Babette Deutsch • John Dewey • Max Eastman • Irwin Edman • Albert Einstein • Richard Hofstadter • Sidney Hook • Aldous Huxley • Karl Jaspers • Joseph Wood Krutch • Max Lerner • Sinclair Lewis • Walter Lippmann • Thomas Mann • Margaret Mead • Robert K. Merton • Harold Nicolson • John Crowe Ransom • Theodore Roethke • Bertrand Russell • George Santayana • Delmore Schwartz • Harlow Shapley • Allen Tate • Norman Thomas • Paul Tillich • Lionel Trilling

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the gods to chide gently about during routine trances, no new work for the gods.

— MARGARET MEAD,
"Community Drama, Bali and America," Winter 1941-42

PACIFICATION

If [another] war is to be prevented, there must be a clearly expressed willingness to go to war for certain ends, but not for any others. These ends should be resistance to aggression anywhere and against anyone, and as soon as possible this purpose should receive its appropriate organization in an international government. Wars will cease when, and only when, it becomes evident beyond reasonable doubt that in any war the aggressor will be defeated.

— BERTRAND RUSSELL,
"The Future of Pacifism," Winter 1943-44

"LITTLE MAGAZINES"

We assume that the really natural state of affairs is for periodicals of relatively large circulation to carry the best ideas and the best writing. . . . No doubt it is a desirable state of affairs, but it does not happen to be the way our culture is now organized. But this is not to say that our culture has no organization at all. What organization our culture does have may well be wasteful to the point of tragedy, but it is an organization, and not a passive one, and in it the little magazine has an integral and not an accidental place. This organization of ours works by a series of secessions from the dominant culture. But also—and this must be understood—it works by a series of introjections into the dominant culture. No statistics can measure the effect upon the dominant culture of these secessions and introjections, but clearly the effect is very considerable.

— LIONEL TRILLING,
"An Integral Part of Our Culture," Winter 1946-47

The 50s

WITCH-HUNTING

What happened to this nation? What came over us? How could we, we particularly, we of all the peoples of the earth, we who have always boasted of our courage and our confidence and our belief in ourselves, our respect for each other, our trust in our own people, our faith in our institutions of self-government—how could *we* fall from ourselves so far? And into such morbid and unmanly fears? Into such spiteful hatreds? Such hysterical suspicion of each other and ourselves?

— ARCHIBALD MACLEISH,
"The American State of Mind," Autumn 1950

SIGNS OF RECOGNITION

In a way, the attention that intellectuals are getting these days, although much of it is venomous and indecent, testifies to the great improvement in our status over that of an earlier day. What might not Henry Adams have given for such signs of recognition! In his day the intellectual was no threat to anybody: whether clergyman or scholar, he had to defer to the "practical" men, the men of business and affairs. It is almost inconceivable today that a father should say, "Where Vanderbilt sits, there is the head of the table. I teach my son to be rich." In the much more fluid and amorphous America of our time, the writer, the artist, the scientist have become figures of glamour, if not of power. It is harder to say where the head of the table is.

— DAVID RIESMAN,
"Intellectual Freedom," Winter 1953-54

THE PLIGHT OF THE POET

People often ask me, "Is there any poet who makes his living writing poetry?" And I have to say, "No." The public has an unusual relation-

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Robert Penn Warren • Richard Wilbur ~ **The 50s:** A. Alvarez • John Berryman • Daniel J. Boorstin • Kenneth Burke • John Ciardi • Malcolm Cowley • Richard Eberhart • Loren Eiseley • Ralph Ellison • John Hope Franklin • Erich Fromm • Donald Hall • Hiram Haydn • John Hersey • Granville Hicks • Karen Horney • Irving Howe • Langston Hughes • Randall Jarrell • Alfred Kazin • John Lukacs • Phyllis McGinley • Archibald MacLeish • W. S. Merwin • Gunnar Myrdal • Howard Nemerov • David Riesman • Richard H. Rovere • Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. • Karl Shapiro • Louis Simpson • B. F. Skinner

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ship to the poet: it doesn't even know that he is there. Our public is a rich and generous one; if it knew that the poet was there, it would pay him for being there. As it is, poets make their living in many ways: by being obstetricians, like William Carlos Williams; or directors of Faber and Faber, like T. S. Eliot; or vice-presidents of the Hartford Accident and Indemnity Company, like Wallace Stevens. But most poets, nowadays, make their living by teaching. Kepler said, "God gives every animal a way to make its living, and He has given the astronomer astrology"; and now, after so many centuries, He has given us poets students. But what He gives with one hand He takes away with the other: He has taken away our readers.

— RANDALL JARRELL,
"Poets, Critics and Readers," Summer 1959

The 60s

POLITICS AND POETRY

The boss nowadays does not have to be an expert himself; in the normal course of nature he cannot be one and boss too. But he has to know who the experts are. So much is this executive style, with its dependency on batteries of advisers, experts, "researchers," the admired "intellectual" style because it works with intellectuals, that the President of this nation of boastful pragmatists, in a public tribute to Robert Frost, told the story of the mother who wrote to the principal of a school, "Don't teach my boy poetry; he's going to run for Congress"—and affirmed: "I've never taken the view that the world of politics and the world of poetry are so far apart." No wonder that some who suffered with Stevenson in 1956 for being too good for the American public felt with Kennedy in 1960 that intellect was at last in touch with power.

— ALFRED KAZIN,
"The President and Other Intellectuals," Autumn 1961

SPY STORIES

The spy is imperturbable not by temperament or by philosophy, but from expertise. He is the competent man. Whether the need of the moment is to play bridge like Culbertson, speak a Finnish dialect like a native, ski to safety over precipices or disable a funicular, he comforts us with his powers no less than with the pedantry of the subject. He makes mistakes, of course, to keep us in countenance, but they are errors of inattention, such as killing the wrong man. We respond to this agreeable image of our scientific world, where knowledge commands power, where facts are uniformly interesting, and where fatalities appear more and more as oversights, professional *faux pas.* These results constitute the romance of the age; why should they not be translated into stories—spy stories especially, since what we know as science comes from ferreting and spying, and since we care so much for truth that we are willing to drug and torture for it?

— JACQUES BARZUN,
"Meditations on the Literature of Spying," Spring 1965

HOPE FOR TOMORROW

If [the civil rights movement] had just given this country Dr. King, a leader of conscience for once in our lifetime, it would have been enough. . . . If it gave us nothing else, it gave us each other forever. It gave some of us bread, some of us shelter, some of us knowledge and pride, all of us comfort. It gave us our children, our husbands, our brothers, our fathers, as men reborn and with a purpose for living. It broke the pattern of black servitude in this country. . . . It gave us history and men far greater than Presidents. It gave us heroes, selfless men of courage and strength, for our little boys to follow. It gave us hope for tomorrow. It called us to life.

— ALICE WALKER,
"The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?" Autumn 1967

William Styron • John Hall Wheelock • William F. Whyte • William Carlos Williams • Edmund Wilson • C. Vann Woodward ⇝ **The 60s:** Daniel Aaron • Conrad Aiken • Robert Ardrey • Hannah Arendt • Daniel Bell • Daniel Berrigan • J. Bronowski • Anthony Burgess • Hortense Calisher • Kenneth B. Clark • James Bryant Conant • James Dickey • Joan Didion • William O. Douglas • René Dubos • Leon Edel • Erik H. Erikson • John K. Fairbank • Dudley Fitts • Frances Fitzgerald • R. Buckminster Fuller • Nathan Glazer • Günter Grass • Oscar Handlin • Robert L. Heilbroner • Carolyn Heilbrun

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AN APPARATUS OF EVASION

The generation gap is now a moral chasm, across which the young stare at their elders with distrust, convinced that the values that make for success are fakes. Evidently the first field in which young people are struck by this suspicion is public life, and there the undeclared war in Vietnam has had a disastrous impact. Who indeed could have believed that, twenty-five years after Pearl Harbor, national policy would be carried on like this?

Young people . . . were shocked to find that they could not be proud of the policy of America and her allies in Asia. This was coupled with a second shock, when they found that they could not be proud of the weapons and methods with which the war was waged.

But the greatest shock of all to the idealism of the young is the way in which official spokesmen manipulate and even hoodwink the public opinion that they are supposed to lead. A whole apparatus of evasion has been developed in which nothing is an outright lie, and yet nothing quite means what it seems to say. The very words are unreal: de-escalation, ultimate deterrent, agonizing reappraisal—a tasteless vocabulary of plastic which George Orwell prophetically called Newspeak.

— J. BRONOWSKI,
"Protest—Past and Present," Autumn 1969

The 70s

RESTORATIVE HORRORS

In 1946 we comfortably supposed that Orwell was talking about other people—Nazis and Stalinists, bureaucrats and sociologists. . . . Now recent history has obliged us to extend his dispiriting analysis to ourselves.

Vietnam and Watergate: these horrors will trouble the rest of our lives. But they are not, I suppose, unmitigated horrors. "Every act rewards itself," said Emerson. As Vietnam instructed us, at terrible cost, in the limit of our wisdom and power in foreign affairs, so Watergate instructed us, at considerably less cost, in the limits of wisdom and power in the presidency. It reminded us of the urgent need to restore the original balance of the Constitution—the balance between presidential power and presidential accountability. In doing this, it has, among other things, brought back into public consciousness the great documents under which the American government was organized.

— ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR.,
"Politics and the American Language," Autumn 1974

"A JEWISH WRITER"

I am often described as a Jewish writer; in much the same way one might be called a Samoan astronomer or an Eskimo cellist or a Zulu Gainsborough expert. There is some oddity about it. I am a Jew, and I have written some books. I have tried to fit my soul into the Jewish-writer category, but it does not feel comfortably accommodated there. I wonder, now and then, whether Philip Roth and Bernard Malamud and I have not become the Hart Schaffner and Marx of our trade. We have made it in the field of culture as Bernard Baruch made it on a park bench, as Polly Adler made it in prostitution, as Two Gun Cohen, the personal bodyguard of Sun Yat-Sen, made it in China. My joke is not broad enough to cover the contempt I feel for the opportunists, wise guys, and career types who impose such labels and trade upon them. In a century so disastrous to Jews, one hesitates to criticize those who believe that they are making the world safer by publicizing Jewish achievements. I myself doubt that this publicity is effective.

— SAUL BELLOW,
"Starting Out in Chicago," Winter 1975

Gilbert Highet • John Hollander • George F. Kennan • Robert Jay Lifton • Marshall McLuhan • Wright Morris • Robert Motherwell • Daniel Patrick Moynihan • Lewis Mumford • Howard Nemerov • Mary Oliver • Muriel Rukeyser • Wole Soyinka • William Stafford • John Updike • Alice Walker • C. V. Wedgwood ~ **The 70s:** Conrad Aiken • Jervis Anderson • James Atlas • Saul Bellow • Jeremy Bernstein • Philip Booth • John Clive • Annie Dillard • Richard Ellmann • Joseph Epstein • Paul Fussell • Peter Gay • Ruth Gay • Clifford Geertz • Anthony Grafton • Anthony Hecht • Gertrude Himmelfarb • Michael Holroyd

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THE WAY WE COOK NOW

In the 1960s we all went to school to Julia Child. Even the humblest supermarket magazine explained how it was possible to be a French chef with ingredients no farther away than the market's own shelves. As a nation we were, as one looks back on it, in our Mannerist period, when the only thing worth doing was something that was difficult. We saw the revival of billiards, bargello embroidery, and bonsai tree cultivation. We are in another decade now, and all that has survived of Julia Child in the 1970s is the elaborate French bread recipe from her second volume: a recipe so difficult that it has confounded a generation of hopeful bakers and sent them willingly back to Wonder Bread and the Peanut-Butter Gourmet.

—RUTH GAY,
"Fear of Food," Summer 1976

The 80s

ART AT ITS BEST

Whether in music or architecture, literature, painting, or sculpture, art opens our eyes, ears, and feelings to something beyond ourselves, something we cannot experience without the artist's vision and the genius of his craft. The placing of Greek temples, like the Temple of Poseidon on the promontory at Sunion, outlined against the piercing blue of the Aegean Sea, Poseidon's home; the majesty of Michelangelo's sculptured figures in stone; Shakespeare's command of language and knowledge of the human soul; the intricate order of Bach, the enchantment of Mozart; the purity of Chinese monochrome pottery with its lovely names—celadon, oxblood, peach blossom, clair de lune; the exuberance of Tiepolo's ceilings where, without picture frames to limit movement, a whole world in exquisitely beautiful colors lives and moves in the sky; the prose and poetry of all the writers from Homer to Cervantes to Jane Austen and John Keats to Dostoevski and Chekhov—who made all these things? We—our species—did. The range is too vast and various to do justice to it in this space, but the random samples I have mentioned, and all the rest they suggest, are sufficient reason to honor mankind.

—BARBARA W. TUCHMAN,
"Mankind's Better Moments," Autumn 1980

LIVING ON THE EDGE

Theoretical scientists, inching away from the safe and known, skirting the point of no return, confront nature with a free invention of the intellect. They strip the discovery down and wire it into place in the form of mathematical models or other abstractions that define the perceived relation exactly. The now-naked idea is scrutinized with as much coldness and outward lack of pity as the naturally warm human heart can muster. They try to put it to use, devising experiments or field observations to test its claims. By the rules of scientific procedure it is then either discarded or temporarily sustained. Either way, the central theory encompassing it grows. If the abstractions survive they generate new knowledge from which further exploratory trips of the mind can be planned. Through the repeated alternation between flights of the imagination and the accretion of hard data, a mutual agreement on the workings of the world is written, in the form of natural law.

—EDWARD O. WILSON,
"The Drive to Discovery," Autumn 1984

"TO TEACH IS TO LEARN TWICE"

A few years after I began teaching, it occurred to me that being a teacher—not being a student—provides the best education. "To teach is to learn twice," wrote Joubert, in a

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Justin Kaplan • Jerzy Kosinski • Irving Kristol • Anne Morrow Lindbergh • Peter Medawar • Arnaldo Momigliano • Clara Claiborne Park • Eric Partridge • William H. Pritchard • Gregory Rabassa • Diane Ravitch • I. A. Richards • Paul Roazen • Richard Rodriguez • Roger Rosenblatt • Sonya Rudikoff • Carl Sagan • Paul A. Samuelson • Mark Schorer • Edward Shils • Hugh Trevor-Roper • Helen Vendler • John Edgar Wideman • James Q. Wilson ~ **The 80s:** A. R. Ammons • Heywood Hale Broun • Robert Brustein • Frederick Crews • Robert Darnton • Guy Davenport • Freeman Dyson • J. C. Furnas

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simple-sounding maxim that could have several different meanings. It could mean that one first learns when getting up the material one is about to teach and then tests and relearns it in the actual teaching. It could mean that being a teacher offers one a fine chance for a second draft on one's inevitably inadequate initial education. It could mean that learning, like certain kinds of love, is better the second time around. It could mean that we are not ready for education, at any rate of the kind that leads on to wisdom, until we are sixty, or seventy, or beyond. I favor this last interpretation, for it accounts for the strange feeling that I have had every year of my adult life, which is that only twelve months ago I was really quite stupid.

—"ARISTIDES"
(EDITOR JOSEPH EPSTEIN),
"Student Evaluation," Spring 1987

The 90s

COURSE CORRECTION

Attacks against science are likely to become more bitter and more widespread in the future, as long as the economic inequities in our society remain sharp and science continues to be predominantly engaged in building toys for the rich. To forestall such attacks, whether or not we feel guilt for the sins of society, the scientific community should invest heavily in projects that benefit all segments of our population. Such projects are not hard to find, and many individual scientists are working on them, working long hours for meager pay. Scientists can participate in the education of children and teachers in poor neighborhoods, or in the staffing of accessible public-health clinics. . . . What is needed is a major commitment of scientific resources to the development of new technology that will bring our derelict cities and derelict children back to life. If our profession does not put its heart into such a commitment, then we shall deserve the passionate hatred that we shall sooner or later encounter.

—FREEMAN J. DYSON,
"Science in Trouble," Autumn 1993

THE LAND OF THE SUBLIME

Everywhere in this place of holy mountains, pagans and Christians have sought similar traffic with the gods on heights. You feel cut off from the world below, intimidatingly intimate with the endless space above. In three directions from Mount Aphrodisium, you see serried peaks, ridges overlooking ridges. By late afternoon, shadowed parts of nearby mountains seem to recede, while brightly lit peaks beyond them spring forward in the liquid air, playing tricks with space. These mountains are heavy with permanence. Yet they also seem to shift about, in the angles they create, to block or open up vistas—to show, all at once, similar heights in differing atmospheres. The result is a psychological effect that might be called "mountain dissociation." The religious experience of these mountains is what is most essential to Arcadia and most absent from Arcadian poetry. This is the land of the sublime, which is always a bit scary, not of the beautiful, which tends to be sedate.

—GARRY WILLS,
"The Real Arcadia," Summer 1998

A GENERATIONAL ICON

What did pink flamingos have to do with real flamingos? Not much. But in the 1970s, [the baby boom generation] began to use them as a ubiquitous signpost for crossing the various, overlapping boundaries of class, taste, propriety, art, sexuality, and nature. . . . In the Reagan eighties, we began uncomfortably to inherit the world in immodest comfort. The crossing of boundaries remained a badge of identity, but it was now safer, and very often

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Rachel Hadas • Arthur Krystal • Philip Larkin • Mary R. Lefkowitz • Beaunion Newbill • [illegible] • Richard Rorty • Kay Ryan • Roger Shattuck • John Simon • Francis Steegmuller • Sheila Steel • [illegible] Tuchman • John Wain • Eugen Weber • Edward O. Wilson • William Zinsser [illegible] The 90s: [illegible] Bérubé • D. Graham Burnett • Hayden Carruth • Christopher Clausen • Billy Collins • [illegible] • Rita Dove • Brian Doyle • Amitai Etzioni • Anne Fadiman • Dana Gioia • [illegible] Hoagland • Adam Hochschild • Andrew Hudgins • Pico Iyer • Jamie James • Brad Leithauser • [illegible]

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a matter of style. The flamingos at poolsides and on condo porches were like blue jeans in boardrooms and Jeeps in Upper West Side garages—or the Don Johnson combination, in *Miami Vice*, of a white Armani suit with a two-day beard and no socks. As the Cat's Pyjamas catalogue advertised, just above a listing for a pink-flamingo vinyl doormat: "On every page, you'll find just what you need to ruin your neighborhood."

—JENNIFER PRICE,
"The Plastic Pink Flamingo: A Natural History,"
Spring 1999

The OOs

YOU'VE GOT MAIL

As millions of people had discovered before me, e-mail was fast. Sixteenth-century correspondents used to write "Haste, haste, haste, for lyfe, for lyfe, haste!" on their most urgent letters; my "server," a word that conjured up a delicious sycophancy, treated *every* message as if someone's life depended on it. Not only did it get there instantly, caromed in a series of analog cyberpackets along the nodes of the Internet and reconverted to digital form via its recipient's modem. (I do not understand a word of what I just wrote, but that is immaterial. Could the average Victorian have diagrammed the mail coach route from Swansea to Tunbridge Wells?) More important, I *answered* e-mail fast—almost always on the day it arrived. No more guilt! . . . At first I made plenty of mistakes. I clicked on the wrong icons, my attachments didn't stick, and, not having learned how to file addresses, I sent an X-rated message to my husband (I thought) at gcolt@aol.com instead of georgecolt@aol.com. I hope Gerald or Gertrude found it flattering.

—"PHILONOË"
(EDITOR ANNE FADIMAN),
"Mail," Winter 2000

BURYING THE DEAD

Here I am in Books 5, 6, and 7 of *The Iliad,* looking in on the clamorous terror of Homeric battle. Lances are being driven clear through eye sockets, livers, and genitals, brains pour out of mouths and severed heads, limbless torsos spin like marbles about the black-blooded earth, men catch their gushing bowels in their hands, crashing "thunderously as towering oaks" onto the blood-soaked ground, and throughout this mayhem there remains on both sides one obsession, one concern: to call an occasional truce that will let each side bury its dead properly. So onto this field of carnage warriors ride, carrying the olive branch, announcing a respite that will enable each camp to carry out its funeral rites. By mutual consent, and for this purpose only, all fighting stops.

—FRANCINE DU PLESSIX GRAY,
"The Work of Mourning," Summer 2000

FACE TO FACE

For more than five hundred years, the envoys of civilization sailed through storms and hacked through jungles, startling in turn one tribe after another of long-lost human cousins. For an instant, before the inevitable breaking of faith, the two groups would face each other, staring—as innocent, both of them, as children, and blameless as if the world had been born afresh.

—ADAM GOODHEART,
"The Last Island of the Savages," Autumn 2000

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Mendeleev's Garden

OLIVER SACKS

In 1945 the Science Museum in London reopened (it had been closed for much of the war), and I—a boy of twelve with a passion for metals and numbers—first saw the giant periodic table displayed there. The table itself, covering a whole wall at the head of the stairs, was a cabinet made of dark wood with ninety-odd cubicles, each inscribed with the name, the atomic weight, and the chemical symbol of its element. And in each cubicle was a sample of the element itself (all of those elements, at least, that had been obtained in pure form, and that could be exhibited safely). It was labeled "The Periodic Classification of the Elements—after Mendeleeff."

My first vision was of metals, dozens of them in every possible form: rods, lumps, cubes, wire, foil, discs, crystals. Most were gray or silver, some had hints of blue or rose. A few had burnished surfaces that shone a faint yellow, and then there were the rich colors of copper and gold.

In the upper right corner were the nonmetals—sulfur in spectacular yellow crystals and selenium in translucent red crystals; phosphorus, like pale beeswax, kept under water; and carbon, as tiny diamonds and shiny black graphite. There was boron, a brownish powder, and ridged crystalline silicon, with a rich black sheen like graphite or galena.

On the left were the alkali and alkaline earth metals, all (except magnesium) in protective baths of naphtha. I was struck by the lithium in the

Oliver Sacks is a neurologist and the author of *Awakenings* and *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat*, among many other books. This article is drawn from his forthcoming memoir, *Uncle Tungsten: Memories of a Chemical Boyhood*, which will be published by Knopf.

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upper corner, for this, with its levity, was floating on the naphtha, and also by the cesium, lower down, which formed a glittering puddle beneath the naphtha. Cesium, I knew, had a very low melting point and it was a hot summer day. But I had not fully realized, from the tiny, partly oxidized lumps I had seen, that pure cesium was pale gold—it gave at first just a glint, a flash of gold, seeming to iridesce with a golden luster; then, from a lower angle, it was purely gold, and looked like a gilded sea, or golden mercury.

There were other elements that up to this point had been only names to me (or, almost equally abstract, names attached to some physical properties and atomic weights), and now for the first time I saw the range of their diversity and actuality. In this first, sensuous glance I saw the table as a gorgeous banquet, a huge table set with eighty-odd different dishes.

I had already become familiar with the properties of many elements and I knew they formed a number of natural families, such as the alkali metals, the alkaline earth metals, and the halogens. These families (Mendeleev called them "groups") formed the verticals of the table—the alkali and alkaline earth metals to the left, the halogens and inert gases to the right, and everything else in four intermediate groups in between. The "groupishness" of these intermediate groups was somewhat less clear—thus in Group VI, I saw sulfur, selenium, and tellurium. I knew that these three (my "stinkogens") were very similar, but what was oxygen doing heading the group? There must be some deeper principle at work—and indeed there was. This was printed at the top of the table, but in my impatience to look at the elements themselves, I had paid no attention to it at all. The deeper principle, I saw, was valency. The term valency was not to be found in my early Victorian books, for it had been properly developed only in the late 1850s, and Dmitri Mendeleev was one of the first to seize on it and use it as a basis for classification, to provide what had never been clear before: a rationale, a basis for the fact that elements seemed to form natural families, to have deep chemical and physical analogies with one another. Mendeleev now recognized eight such groups of elements in terms of their valencies.

Thus the elements in Group I, the alkali metals, had a valency of 1: one atom of these would combine with one atom of hydrogen, to form compounds such as LiH, NaH, KH, and so on. (Or with one atom of chlorine, to form compounds such as LiCl, NaCl, or KCl.) The elements of Group II, the alkaline earth metals, had a valency of 2, and so would form compounds such as $CaCl_2$, $SrCl_2$, $BaCl_2$, and so on. The elements of Group VIII had a maximum combining power of 8.

But while Mendeleev was organizing the elements in terms of valency, he was also fascinated by atomic weights and the fact that these were unique and specific to each element, that they were, in a sense, the atomic signature of each element. And if, mentally, he started to index

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the elements according to their valencies, he did this equally in terms of their atomic weights. And now, magically, the two came together. For if he arranged the elements, quite simply, in order of their atomic weights, in horizontal "periods," as he called them, one could see recurrences of the same properties and valencies at regular intervals.

Every element echoed the properties of the one above, was a slightly heavier member of the same family. The same melody, so to speak, was played in each period—first an alkali metal, then an alkaline earth metal, then six more elements, each with its own valency or tone—but played in a different register (it was impossible to avoid thinking of octaves and scales here, for I lived in a musical house, and scales were the periodicity I heard daily).

It was eightness that dominated the periodic table before me, though one could also see, in the lower part of the table, that extra elements were interposed within the basic octets: ten extra elements apiece in Periods 4 and 5, and ten plus fourteen in Period 6.

So one went up, each period completing itself and leading to the next one in a series of dizzying loops—at least this is the form my imagination took, so that the sober, rectangular table before me was transformed, mentally, into spirals or loops. The table was a sort of cosmic staircase or a Jacob's ladder, going up to, coming down from, a Pythagorean heaven.

I got a sudden, overwhelming sense of how startling the periodic table must have seemed to those who first saw it—chemists who were profoundly familiar with seven or eight chemical families but had never realized the basis of these families (valency), nor how all of them might be brought together into a single overarching scheme. I wondered if they had reacted as I did to this first revelation: "Of course! How obvious! Why didn't I think of it myself?"

Whether one thought in terms of the verticals or in terms of the horizontals—either way one arrived at the same grid. It was like a crossword puzzle that could be approached by either the "down" or the "across" clues, except that a crossword was arbitrary, a purely human construct, while the periodic table reflected a deep order in nature, for it showed all the elements arrayed in a fundamental relationship. I had the sense that it harbored a marvelous secret, but it was a cryptogram without a key—*why* was this relationship so?

I could scarcely sleep for excitement the night after seeing the periodic table—it seemed to me an incredible achievement to have brought the whole, vast, and seemingly chaotic universe of chemistry to an all-embracing order. The first great intellectual clarifications had occurred with Lavoisier's defining of elements, with J. L. Proust's finding that elements combined in discrete proportions only, and with Dalton's notion that elements had atoms with unique atomic weights. With these, chemistry had come of age and had become the chemistry of the elements. But

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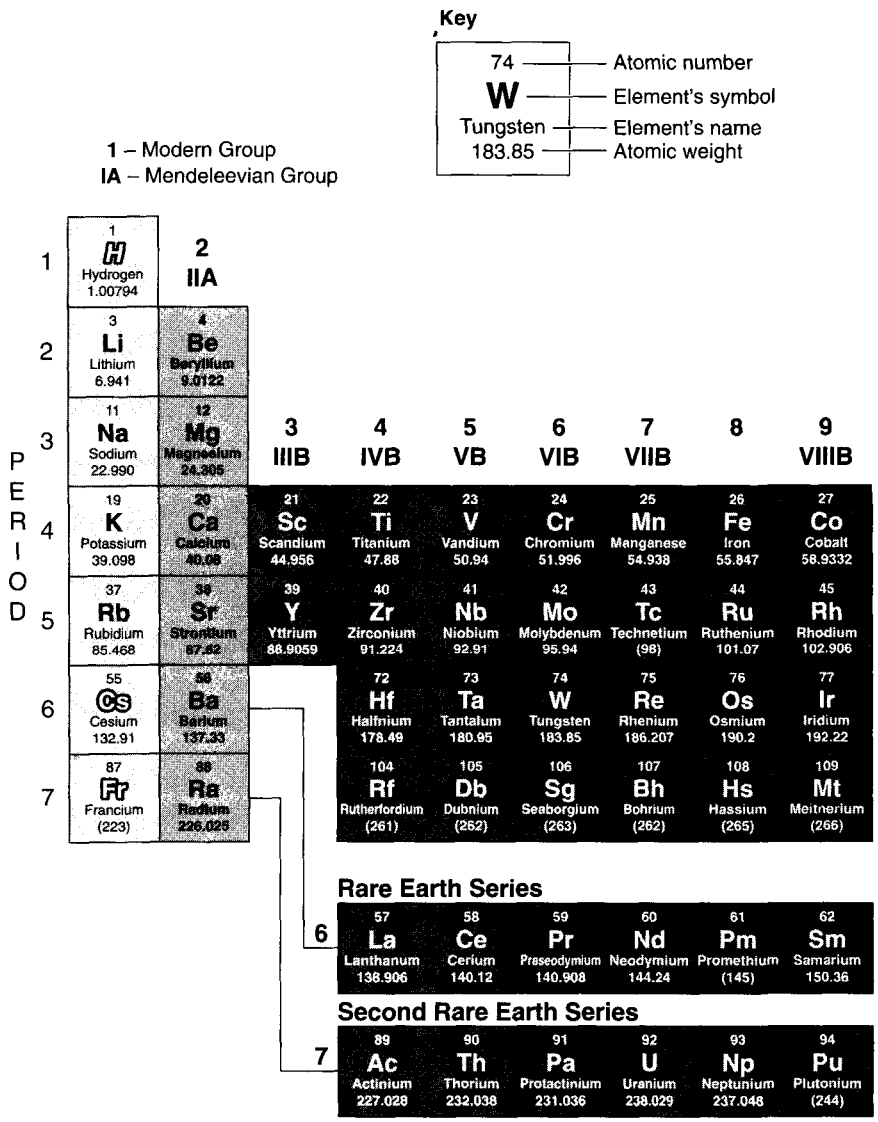
Periodic Table of the Elements



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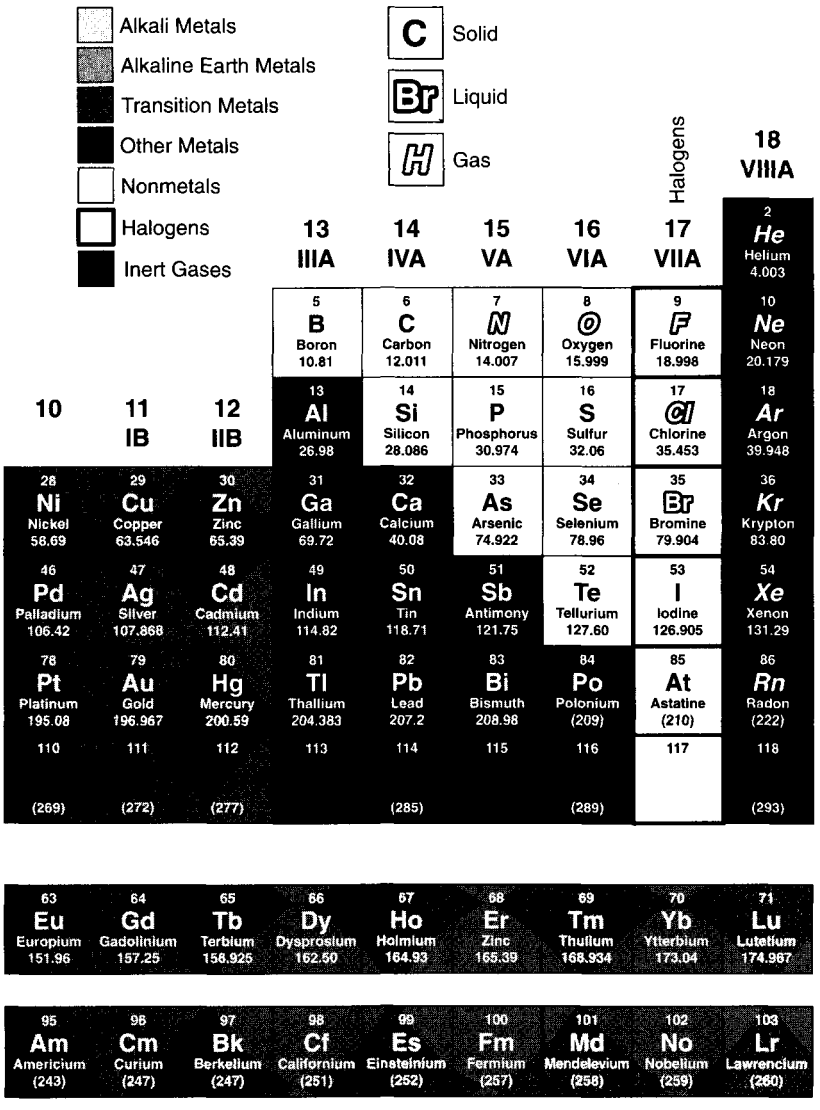

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the elements themselves were not seen to come in any order; they could be listed only alphabetically (as Pepper did in his *Playbook of Metals*) or in terms of isolated local families or groups. Nothing beyond this was possible until Mendeleev's achievement. To have perceived an *overall* organization, a superarching principle uniting and relating *all* the elements, had a quality of the miraculous, of genius. And this gave me, for the first time, a sense of the transcendent power of the human mind, and the fact that it might be equipped to discover or decipher the deepest secrets of nature, to read the mind of God.

I kept dreaming of the periodic table in the excited half-sleep of that night—I dreamed of it as a flashing, revolving pinwheel or Catherine wheel, and then as a great nebula, going from the first element to the last, and whirling beyond uranium, out to infinity. The next day I could hardly wait to get to the museum and dashed up to the top floor, where the table was, as soon as the doors were opened.

On this second visit I found myself looking at the table in almost geographic terms, as a realm, a kingdom, with different territories and boundaries. Seeing the table as a geographic realm allowed me to rise above the individual elements and to see certain general gradients and trends. Metals had long been recognized as a special category of elements, and now one could see, in a single synoptic glance, how they occupied three-quarters of the realm—all of the west side, most of the south—leaving only a smallish area, mostly in the northeast, for the nonmetals. A jagged line, like Hadrian's Wall, separated the metals from the rest, with a few "semimetals," metalloids—arsenic, selenium—straddling the wall. One could see the gradients of acid and base, how the oxides of the "western" elements reacted with water to form alkalis, the oxides of the "eastern" elements, mostly nonmetals, to form acids. One could see, again at a glance, how the elements on either border of the realm—the alkali metals and halogens, like sodium and chlorine, for example—showed the greatest avidity for each other and combined with explosive force, forming crystalline salts with high melting points, which dissolved to form electrolytes, while those in the middle formed a very different sort of compound: volatile liquids or gases that resisted electric currents. One could see, remembering how Volta and Davy and Berzelius ranked the elements into an electrical series, how the most strongly electropositive elements were all to the left, the most strongly electronegative to the right. Thus it was not just the placement of the individual elements, but trends of every sort that hit the eye when one looked at the table.

Seeing the table, "getting" it, altered my life. I took to visiting it as often as I could. I copied it into my exercise book and carried it everywhere; I got to know it so well—visually and conceptually—that I could mentally trace its paths in every direction, going up a group, then turning

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right on a period, stopping, going down one, yet always knowing where I was. It was like a garden, the garden of numbers I had loved as a child—but unlike that garden, it was real, a key to the universe. I spent hours now, totally absorbed, wandering, making discoveries, in the enchanted garden of Mendeleev.

There was a photograph of Mendeleev next to the periodic table in the museum; he looked like a cross between Fagin and Svengali, with a huge mass of hair and beard and piercing, hypnotic eyes. A wild, extravagant, barbaric figure—as romantic, in his way, as the Byronic Humphry Davy. I needed to know more of him, and to read his famous *Principles of Chemistry*, in which he had first published his periodic table.

His book, his life, did not disappoint me. He was a man of encyclopedic interests. He was also a music lover and a close friend of Borodin (who was also a chemist). And he was the author of the most delightful and vivid chemistry text ever published.[1]

Like my own parents, Mendeleev had come from a huge family—he was the youngest, I read, of fourteen children. His mother must have recognized his precocious intelligence, and when he reached fourteen, feeling that he would be lost without a proper education, she walked thousands of miles from Siberia with him—first to the University of Moscow (from which, as a Siberian, he was barred) and then to St. Petersburg, where he got a grant to train as a teacher. (She herself, apparently, nearing sixty at the time, died from exhaustion after this prodigious effort. Mendeleev, profoundly attached to her, was later to dedicate the *Principles* to her memory.)

Even as a student in St. Petersburg, Mendeleev showed not only an insatiable curiosity but a hunger for organizing principles of all kinds. Linnaeus, in the eighteenth century, had classified animals and plants, and (much less successfully) minerals, too. Dana, in the 1830s, had replaced the old physical classification of minerals with a chemical classification of a dozen or so main categories (native elements, oxides, sulfides, and so on). But there was no such classification for the elements themselves, and there were now some sixty elements known. Some elements, indeed, seemed almost impossible to categorize. Where did uranium go, or that puzzling, ultralight metal, beryllium? Some of the most recently discovered elements were particularly difficult—thallium, for example,

[1] In his very first footnote, in the preface, Mendeleev spoke of "how contented, free, and joyous is life in the realm of science"—and one could see, in every sentence, how true this was for him. The *Principles* grew like a living thing in Mendeleev's lifetime, each edition larger, fuller, more mature than its predecessors, each filled with exuberating and spreading footnotes (footnotes that became so enormous that in the last editions they filled more pages than the text; indeed, some occupied nine-tenths of the page—I think my own love of footnotes, the excursions they allow, was partly determined by reading the *Principles*).

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discovered in 1862, was in some ways similar to lead, in others to silver, in others to aluminum, and in yet others to potassium.

It was nearly twenty years from Mendeleev's first interest in classification to the emergence of his periodic table in 1869. This long pondering and incubation (so similar, in a way, to Darwin's before he published *On the Origin of Species*) was perhaps the reason why, when Mendeleev finally published his *Principles*, he could bring a vastness of knowledge and insight far beyond any of his contemporaries—some of them also had a clear vision of periodicity, but none of them could marshal the overwhelming detail he could.

Mendeleev described how he would write the properties and atomic weights of the elements on cards and ponder and shuffle these constantly on his long railway journeys through Russia, playing a sort of patience or (as he called it) "chemical solitaire," groping for an order, a system that might bring sense to all the elements, their properties and atomic weights.

There was another crucial factor. There had been considerable confusion, for decades, about the atomic weights of many elements. It was only when this was cleared up at the first international conference of chemists, at Karlsruhe, in 1860, that Mendeleev and others could even think of achieving a full taxonomy of the elements. Mendeleev had gone to Karlsruhe with Borodin (this was a musical as well as a chemical journey, for they stopped at many churches en route, trying out the local organs). With the old, pre-Karlsruhe atomic weights, one could get a sense of local triads or groups, but one could not see that there was a numerical relationship between the groups themselves.[2] Only when Cannizzaro showed how reliable atomic weights could be obtained, and showed, for example, that the proper atomic weights for the alkaline earth metals (calcium, strontium, and barium) were 40, 88, and 137 (not 20, 44, and 68, as formerly believed) did it become clear how close these were to those of the alkali metals—potassium, rubidium, and cesium. It was this closeness,

[2] Mendeleev was not the first to see some significance in the atomic weights of elements. When the atomic weights of the alkaline earth metals were established by Berzelius, Döbereiner was struck by the fact that the atomic weight of strontium was just midway between that of calcium and barium. Was this an accident, as Berzelius thought, or an indication of something important and general? Berzelius himself had just discovered selenium in 1817 and at once realized that (in terms of chemical properties) it "belonged" between sulfur and tellurium. Döbereiner went further, and brought out a quantitative relationship too, for selenium's atomic weight was just midway between theirs. And when lithium was discovered later that year (also in Berzelius's kitchen lab), Döbereiner observed that it completed another triad, of alkali metals: lithium, sodium, and potassium. Feeling, moreover, that the gap in atomic weight between chlorine and iodine was too great, Döbereiner thought (as Davy had before him) that there must be a third element analogous to them, a halogen, with an atomic weight midway between theirs. (This element, bromine, was discovered a few years later.)

There were mixed reactions to Döbereiner's "triads," with their implication of a correlation between atomic weight and chemical character. Berzelius and Davy were doubtful of the significance of such "numerology," as they saw it, but others were intrigued and wondered whether an obscure but fundamental significance was lurking in Döbereiner's figures.

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and in turn the closeness of the atomic weights of the halogens—chlorine, bromine, and iodine—that incited Mendeleev, in 1868, to make a small grid juxtaposing the three groups:

Cl	35.5	K	39	Ca	40
Br	80	Rb	85	Sr	88
I	127	Cs	133	Ba	137

And it was at this point, seeing that arranging the three groups of elements in order of atomic weight produced a repetitive pattern—a halogen followed by an alkali metal, followed by an alkaline earth metal—that Mendeleev, feeling this must be a fragment of a larger pattern, leapt to the idea of a periodicity governing *all* the elements: a Periodic Law.

Mendeleev's first small table had to be filled in, and then extended in all directions, as if filling up a crossword puzzle; this in itself required some bold speculations. What element, he wondered, was chemically allied with the alkaline earth metals, yet followed lithium in atomic weight? No such element apparently existed—or could it be beryllium, usually considered to be trivalent, with an atomic weight of 14.5? What if it was bivalent instead, with an atomic weight, therefore, not of 14.5 but 9? Then it would follow lithium and fit into the vacant space perfectly.

Moving between conscious calculation and hunch, between intuition and analysis, Mendeleev arrived within a few weeks at a tabulation of thirty-odd elements in order of ascending atomic weight, a tabulation that now suggested there was a recapitulation of properties with every eighth element. And on the night of February 16, 1869, it is said, he had a dream in which he saw almost all of the known elements arrayed in a grand table. The following morning, he committed this to paper. [3]

The logic and pattern of Mendeleev's table were so clear that certain anomalies stood out at once. Certain elements seemed to be in the wrong places, while certain places had no elements. On the basis of his enormous chemical knowledge, he repositioned half a dozen elements, in defiance of their accepted valency and atomic weights. In doing this, he displayed an audacity that shocked some of his contemporaries (Lothar Meyer, for one, felt it was monstrous to change atomic weights simply because they did not "fit").

[3] This, at least, is the accepted myth, and one that was later promulgated by Mendeleev himself, somewhat as Kekulé was to describe his own discovery of the benzene ring years later, as the result of a dream of snakes biting their own tails. But if one looks at the actual table that Mendeleev sketched, one can see that it is full of transpositions, crossings-out, and calculations in the margins. It shows, in the most graphic way, the creative struggle for understanding, which was going on in his mind. Mendeleev did not wake from his dream with all the answers in place, but, more interestingly, perhaps, woke with a sense of revelation, so that within hours he was able to solve many of the questions that had occupied him for years.

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In an act of supreme confidence, Mendeleev reserved several empty spaces in his table for elements "as yet unknown." He asserted that by extrapolating from the properties of the elements above and below (and also, to some extent, from those to either side) one might make a confident prediction as to what these unknown elements would be like. He did exactly this in his 1871 table, predicting in great detail a new element ("eka-aluminum") that would come below aluminum in Group III. Four years later just such an element was found, by the French chemist Lecoq de Boisbaudran, and named (either patriotically, or in sly reference to himself, *gallus*, the cock) gallium.

The exactness of Mendeleev's prediction was astonishing: he predicted an atomic weight of 68 (Lecoq got 69.9) and a specific gravity of 5.9 (Lecoq got 5.94) and correctly guessed at a great number of gallium's other physical and chemical properties—its fusibility, its oxides, its salts, its valency. There were some initial discrepancies between Lecoq's observations and Mendeleev's predictions, but all of these were rapidly resolved in favor of Mendeleev. Indeed, it was said that Mendeleev had a better grasp of the properties of gallium—an element he had never even seen—than the man who actually discovered it.

Suddenly Mendeleev was no longer seen as a mere speculator or dreamer, but as a man who had discovered a basic law of nature, and now the periodic table was transformed from a pretty but unproven scheme to an invaluable guide that could allow a vast amount of previously unconnected chemical information to be coordinated. It could also be used to suggest all sorts of research in the future, including a systematic search for "missing" elements. "Before the promulgation of this law," Mendeleev was to say nearly twenty years later, "chemical elements were mere fragmentary, incidental facts in Nature; there was no special reason to expect the discovery of new elements."

Now, with Mendeleev's periodic table, one could not only expect their discovery but predict their very properties. Mendeleev made two more equally detailed predictions, and these were also confirmed with the discovery of scandium and germanium a few years later.[4] Here, as with gallium, he made his predictions on the basis of analogy and linearity, guessing that the physical and chemical properties of these unknown

[4] In an 1889 footnote—even his lectures had footnotes, at least in their printed versions—he added: "I foresee some more new elements, but not with the same certitude as before." Mendeleev was well aware of the gap between bismuth (with an atomic weight of 209) and thorium (232), and conceived that several elements must exist to fill it. He was most certain of the element immediately following bismuth—"an element analogous to tellurium, which we may call dvi-tellurium." This element, polonium, was discovered by the Curies in 1898, and when finally isolated it had almost all the properties Mendeleev had predicted. (In 1899 Mendeleev visited the Curies in Paris and welcomed radium as his "eka-barium.")

In the final edition of the *Principles*, Mendeleev made many other predictions—including two

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elements, and their atomic weights, would be between those of the neighboring elements in their vertical groups.[5]

The keystone to the whole table, curiously, was not anticipated by Mendeleev, and perhaps could not have been, for this was a question not of a missing element but of an entire family or group. When argon was discovered in 1894—an element that did not seem to fit anywhere in the table—Mendeleev denied at first that it could be an element and thought it was a heavier form of nitrogen (N_3, analogous to ozone, O_3). But then it became apparent that there was a space for it, right between chlorine and potassium, and indeed, for a whole group coming between the halogens

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heavier analogs of manganese—an "eka-manganese" with an atomic weight of around 99, and a "tri-manganese" with an atomic weight of 188; sadly, he never saw these. "Tri-manganese"—rhenium—was not discovered until 1925, the last of the naturally occurring elements to be found; while "eka-manganese," technetium, was the first new element to be artificially made, in 1937.

He also envisaged, by analogy, some elements following uranium.

[5] It is a remarkable example of synchronicity that in the decade following the Karlsruhe conference there emerged not one but *six* such classifications, all completely independent of one another: de Chancourtois's in France, Odling's and Newlands's, both in England, Lothar Meyer's in Germany, Hinrichs's in America, and finally Mendeleev's in Russia, all pointing toward a periodic law.

De Chancourtois, a French mineralogist, was the first to devise such a classification, and in 1862—just eighteen months after Karlsruhe—he inscribed the symbols of twenty-four elements spiraling around a vertical cylinder at heights proportional to their atomic weights, so that elements with similar properties fell one beneath another. Tellurium occupied the midpoint of the helix; hence he called it a "telluric screw," a *vis tellurique.* But the *Comptes Rendu,* when they came to publish his paper, managed—grotesquely—to omit the crucial illustration, and this, among other problems, put paid to the whole enterprise, causing de Chancourtois's ideas to be ignored.

Newlands, in England, was scarcely any luckier. He, too, arranged the known elements by increasing atomic weight, and seeing that every eighth element, apparently, was analogous to the first, he proposed a "Law of Octaves," saying that "the eighth element, starting from a given one, is a kind of repetition of the first, like the 8th note in an octave of music." (Had the inert gases been known at the time, it would, of course, have been every ninth element that resembled the first.) A too-literal comparison to music, and the suggestion even that these octaves might be a sort of "cosmic music," evoked a sarcastic response at the meeting of the Chemical Society at which Newlands presented his theory; it was said that he might have done as well to arrange the elements alphabetically.

There is no doubt that Newlands, even more than de Chancourtois, was very close to a periodic law. Like Mendeleev, Newlands had the courage to invert the order of certain elements when their atomic weight did not match what seemed to be their proper position in his table (though he failed to make any predictions of unknown elements, as Mendeleev did).

Lothar Meyer was also at the Karlsruhe conference and was one of the first to use the revised atomic weights published there in a periodic classification. In 1868 he came up with an elaborate sixteen-columned periodic table (but the publication of this was delayed until after Mendeleev's table had appeared). Lothar Meyer paid special attention to the physical properties of the elements and their relation to atomic weights, and in 1870 he published a famous graph plotting the atomic weights of the known elements against their "atomic volumes" (this being the ratio of atomic weight to density), a graph that showed high points for the alkali metals and low points for the dense, small-atomed metals of Group VIII (the platinum and iron metals), with all the other elements falling nicely in between. This graph proved a most potent argument for a periodic law and did much to assist the acceptance of Mendeleev's work.

But at the time of discovering his "Natural System," Mendeleev was either ignorant of, or denied knowledge of, any attempts comparable to his own. Later, when his name and fame were established, he became more knowledgeable, perhaps more generous, less threatened by the notion of any co-discoverers or forerunners. When, in 1889, he was invited to give the Faraday Lecture in London, he paid a measured tribute to those who had come before him.

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and the alkali metals in every period. This was realized by Lecoq, who went on to predict the atomic weights of the other yet-to-be-discovered gases—and these, indeed, were discovered in short order. With the discovery of helium, neon, krypton, and xenon, it was clear that these gases formed a perfect periodic group—a group so inert, so modest, so unobtrusive, as to have escaped for a century the chemist's attention.[6] The inert gases were identical in their inability to form compounds; they had a valency, it seemed, of zero.[7]

The periodic table was incredibly beautiful, the most beautiful thing I had ever seen. I could never adequately analyze what I meant here by beauty—simplicity? coherence? rhythm? inevitability? Or perhaps it was the symmetry, the comprehensiveness of every element firmly locked into its place, with no gaps, no exceptions, everything implying everything else.

I was disturbed when one enormously erudite chemist, J. W. Mellor, whose vast treatise on inorganic chemistry I had started dipping into, spoke of the periodic table as "superficial" and "illusory," no truer, no more fundamental than any other ad hoc classification. This threw me into a brief panic, made it imperative for me to see if the idea of periodicity was supported in any ways beyond chemical character and valency.

Exploring this took me away from my lab, took me to a new book that immediately became my bible, the *CRC Handbook of Physics and Chemistry*, a thick, almost cubical book of nearly three thousand pages, containing

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[6] Cavendish, however, sparking the nitrogen and oxygen of air together, had observed in 1785 that a small amount ("not more than 1/120th part of the whole") was totally resistant to combination, but no one paid any attention to this until the 1890s.

[7] I think I identified at times with the inert gases and at other times anthropomorphized them, imagining them lonely, cut off, yearning to bond. Was bonding, bonding with other elements, absolutely impossible for them? Might not fluorine, the most active, the most outrageous of the halogens, so eager to combine that it had defeated efforts to isolate it for more than a century—might not fluorine, if given a chance, at least bond with xenon, the heaviest of the inert gases? I pored over tables of physical constants and decided that such a combination was, in principle, just possible.

In the early 1960s, I was overjoyed to hear (even though my mind at this time had moved on to other things) that Neil Bartlett had managed to prepare such a compound—a triple compound of platinum, fluorine, and xenon. Xenon fluorides and xenon oxides were subsequently made.

Freeman Dyson has written to me describing his boyhood love of the periodic table and of the inert gases—he, too, saw them, in their bottles, in the Science Museum in South Kensington—and his excitement years later when he was shown a specimen of barium xenate, seeing the elusive, unreactive gas firmly and beautifully locked up in a crystal:

> For me too, the periodic table was a passion. . . . As a boy, I stood in front of the display for hours, thinking how wonderful it was that each of these metal foils and jars of gas had its own distinct personality. . . . One of the memorable moments of my life was when Willard Libby came to Princeton with a little jar full of crystals of barium xenate. A stable compound, looking like common salt, but much heavier. This was the magic of chemistry, to see xenon trapped into a crystal.

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tables of every imaginable physical and chemical property, many of which, obsessively, I learned by heart.

I learned the densities, melting points, boiling points, refractive indices, solubilities, and crystalline forms of all the elements and hundreds of their compounds. I became consumed with graphing these, plotting atomic weights against every physical property I could think of. I became more and more excited, exuberant, the more I explored, for almost everything I looked at showed periodicity: not only density, melting point, boiling point, but conductivity for heat and electricity, crystalline form, hardness, volume changes with fusion, expansion by heat, electrode potentials, etc., etc. It was not just valency, then, it was physical properties, too. The power, the universality of the periodic table was increased for me by this confirmation.

There were exceptions to the trends shown in the periodic table, anomalies, too—some of them profound. Why, for example, was manganese such a bad conductor of electricity when the elements on either side of it were reasonably good conductors? Why was strong magnetism confined to the iron metals? And yet these exceptions, I was somehow convinced, reflected special additional mechanisms at work, and in no sense invalidated the overall system.[8]

Using the periodic table, I tried my hand at prediction too, trying to predict the properties of a couple of still-unknown elements as Mendeleev had done for gallium and the others. I had observed, when I first saw the museum table, that there were four gaps in it. The last of the alkali metals, element 87, was still missing, as was the last of the halogens, element 85. Element 43, the one below manganese, was still missing, though this space read "?Masurium" with no atomic weight.[9] Finally there was a rare earth, element 61, missing too.

It was easy to predict the properties of the unknown alkali metal, for the alkali metals were all very similar, and one had only to extrapolate

[8] A spectacular anomaly came up with the hydrides of the nonmetals—an ugly bunch, about as inimical to life as one could get. Arsenic and antimony hydrides were very poisonous and smelly; silicon and phosphorus hydrides were spontaneously inflammable. I had made in my lab the hydrides of sulfur (H_2S), selenium (H_2Se), and tellurium (H_2Te), all Group VI elements, all dangerous and vile-smelling gases. The hydride of oxygen, the first Group VI element, one might predict by analogy, would be a foul-smelling, poisonous, inflammable gas, too, condensing to a nasty liquid around -100°C. And instead it was water (H_2O)—stable, potable, odorless, benign, and with a host of special, indeed unique properties (its expansion when frozen, its great heat capacity, its capacity as an ionizing solvent, etc.) which made it indispensable to our watery planet, indispensable to life itself. What made it such an anomaly? The properties of water did not undermine for me the placement of oxygen in the periodic table, but they made me intensely curious as to why it was so different from its analogs. (This question, I found, had been resolved only recently, in the 1930s, with Linus Pauling's delineation of the hydrogen bond.)

[9] Ida Tacke Noddack was one of a team of German scientists who found element 75, rhenium, in 1925–26. Noddack also claimed to have found element 43, which she called masurium. But this claim

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from the other elements in the group. Element 87, I reckoned, would be the heaviest, most fusible, most reactive of them all; it would be a liquid at room temperature and, like cesium, have a golden sheen. Indeed, it might be salmon pink, like molten copper. It would be even more electropositive than cesium, and show an even stronger photoelectric effect. Like the other alkali metals, it would color flames a striking color—probably a bluish color, since the flame colors from lithium to cesium tended in this direction.

It was equally easy to predict the properties of the unknown halogen, for the halogens, too, were very similar, and the group showed simple, linear trends.

But predicting the properties of 43 and 61 would be trickier, for these were not "typical" elements (in Mendeleev's term). And it was precisely with such nontypical elements that Mendeleev had run into trouble, leading him to revise his original table. The transition elements had a sort of homogeneity. They were all metals, all thirty of them, and most of them, like iron, were hard and tough, dense and infusible. This was especially so of the heavy transition elements, like the platinum metals and filament that I had been introduced to by my Uncle Dave, who manufactured light bulbs with tungsten filaments (we often called him Uncle Tungsten). My interest in color brought home another fact, that where compounds of typical elements were usually colorless, like common salt, the compounds of transition metals often had vivid colors: the pink minerals and salts of manganese and cobalt, the green of nickel and copper salts, the many colors of vanadium; going with their many colors were their many valencies, too. All these properties showed me that the transition elements were a special sort of animal, different in nature from the typical elements.

Still, one might hazard a guess that element 43 would have some of the characteristics of manganese and rhenium, the other metals in its group (it would, for instance, have a maximum valency of 7 and form colored salts), but it would also be generically similar to the neighboring transition metals in its period—niobium and molybdenum to the left, and the light platinum metals to the right. So one could also predict that it would be a shining, hard, silvery metal with a density and melting point similar to theirs. It would be just the sort of metal Uncle Tungsten would love, and just the sort of metal that would have been discovered by Scheele in the 1770s—that is, if it existed in sensible amounts.

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could not be supported, and she was discredited. In 1934, when Fermi shot neutrons at uranium and thought he had made element 93, Noddack suggested that he was wrong, that he had in fact split the atom. But since she had been discredited with element 43, no one paid any attention to her. Had she been listened to, Germany would probably have had the atomic bomb and the history of the world would have been different. (This story was told by Glenn Seaborg when he was presenting his recollections at a conference in November 1997.)

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The hardest prediction, in any detail, would be for element 61, the missing rare earth metal, for these elements were in many ways the most baffling of all.

I think I first heard of the rare earths from my mother, who was a chain smoker and lit cigarette after cigarette with a small Ronson lighter. She showed me the "flint" one day, pulling it out, and said it was not really flint but a metal that produced sparks when it was scratched. This "mischmetal"—cerium mostly—was a mishmash of half a dozen different metals, all of them very similar, all of them rare earths. This odd name, "the rare earths," had a mythical or fairy-tale sound to it, and I imagined the rare earths not only as rare and precious but as having special, secret qualities possessed by nothing else.

Later Uncle Dave told me of the extraordinary difficulty that chemists had had in separating the individual rare earths—there were a dozen or more, and they were astoundingly similar, at times indistinguishable in their physical and chemical properties. Their ores (which for some reason all seemed to come from Sweden) contained not just a single rare-earth element but a whole cluster of them, as if nature herself had trouble distinguishing them. Their analysis formed a whole saga in chemical history, a saga of passionate research (and frequently of frustration) in the hundred years or more it took to identify them. The separation of the last few rare-earth elements, indeed, was beyond the powers of chemistry in the nineteenth century, and it was only with the use of physical methods such as spectroscopy and fractional crystallization that they were finally separated. No fewer than fifteen thousand fractional crystallizations, exploiting the infinitesimal differences in solubility between their salts, were needed to separate the final two, ytterbium and lutecium—an enterprise that occupied years.

Nonetheless, there were chemists who were enthralled with the intransigent rare-earth elements and spent their entire lives trying to isolate them, sensing that their study might cast an unexpected light on all the elements and their periodicities:

> The rare earths [wrote William Crookes) perplex us in our researches, baffle us in our speculations, and haunt us in our very dreams. They stretch like an unknown sea before us, mocking, mystifying, and murmuring strange revelations and possibilities.

If the rare-earth elements baffled, mocked, and haunted chemists, they positively maddened Mendeleev as he struggled to assign them a place in his periodic table. There were only five rare earths known when he constructed his first table, in 1869, but then more and more were discovered in the decades that followed, and with each discovery the

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problem grew, because all of them, with their consecutive atomic weights, belonged (it seemed) in a single space in the table, crushed, as it were, between two adjoining elements in Period 6. Others, too, struggled with the placement of the maddeningly similar elements, further frustrated by a deep uncertainty as to how many rare-earth elements there might ultimately prove to be.

Many chemists, by the end of the nineteenth century, were inclined to put both the transition and the rare-earth elements into separate "blocks," for one needed a periodic table with more space, more dimensions, to accommodate these "extra" elements that seemed to interrupt the basic eight groups of the table. I tried making different forms of a periodic table myself to accommodate these blocks, experimenting with spiral ones and three-dimensional ones. Many others, I later found, had done the same: more than a hundred versions of the table appeared during Mendeleev's lifetime.

All of the tables I made, all of the tables I saw, ended with uncertainty, ended with a question mark, centered on the "last" element, uranium. I was intensely curious about this, about Period 7, which started with an as-yet-unknown alkali metal, element 87, but got only as far as uranium, element 92. Why, I wondered, should it stop here, after only six elements? Could there not be more elements, beyond uranium?

Uranium itself had been placed by Mendeleev under tungsten, the heaviest of the Group VI transition elements, for it was very much like tungsten, chemically. (Tungsten formed a volatile hexafluoride, a very dense vapor, and so did uranium—this compound, UF_6, was used in the war to separate out the isotopes of uranium.) Uranium *seemed* like a transition metal, *seemed* like eka-tungsten—and yet I felt somehow uncomfortable about this, and decided to do a little exploring, to examine the densities and melting points of all the transition metals. As soon as I did this I discovered an anomaly, for where the densities of the metals steadily increased through Periods 4, 5, and 6, they unexpectedly declined when one came to the elements in Period 7. Uranium was actually *less* dense than tungsten, though one would have expected it to be more so (thorium, similarly, was less dense than hafnium, not more so, as one would have expected). It was precisely the same with their melting points: these reached a maximum in Period 6, then suddenly declined.

I was excited about this; I felt I had made a discovery. Was it possible, despite all the similarities between uranium and tungsten, that uranium did not in fact belong in the same group, was not even a transition metal at all? Might this also be the case for the other Period 7 elements, thorium and protactinium, and the (imaginary) elements beyond uranium? Could it be that these elements were instead the beginning of a second rare-earth series precisely analogous to the first one in Period 6? If this

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was the case, then eka-tungsten would be not uranium but an as-yet-undiscovered element, which would appear only after the second rare-earth series had completed itself. In 1945, this was still unimaginable, the stuff of science fiction.

I was thrilled, soon after the war, to find that I had guessed right, when it was revealed that Glenn Seaborg and his co-workers in Berkeley had succeeded in making a number of transuranic elements—elements 93, 94, 95, and 96—and found that these indeed were part of a second series of rare-earth elements (which, by analogy with the first rare-earth series, the lanthanides, he called the actinides).[10]

The number of elements in the second series of rare earths, Seaborg argued, by analogy with the first series, would also be fourteen, and after the fourteenth (element 103) one might expect ten transition elements, and only then the concluding elements of Period 7, ending with an inert gas at element 118. Beyond this, Seaborg suggested, a new period would start, beginning, like all the others, with an alkali metal, element 119.

It seemed that the periodic table might thus be extended to new elements far beyond uranium, elements that might not even exist in nature. Whether there was any limit to such transuranic elements was not clear: perhaps the atoms of such elements would become too big to hold together. But the principle of periodicity was fundamental and could be extended, it seemed, indefinitely.

While Mendeleev saw the periodic table primarily as a tool for organizing and predicting the properties of the elements, he also felt it embodied a fundamental law, and he wondered on occasion about "the invisible world of chemical atoms." For the periodic table, it was clear, looked both ways: outward to the manifest properties of the elements, and inward to some as-yet-unknown atomic property that determined these.

In that first, long, rapt encounter in the Science Museum, I was convinced that the periodic table was neither arbitrary nor superficial, but a representation of truths that would never be overturned but would, on the contrary, continually be confirmed, show new depths with new knowledge, because it was as deep and simple as nature itself. And the perception of this produced in my twelve-year-old self a sort of ecstasy, the sense (in Einstein's words) that "a corner of the great veil had been lifted."

[10] Although elements 93 and 94, neptunium and plutonium, were created in 1940, their existence was not made public until after the war. They were given provisional names, when they were first made, of "extremium" and "ultimium," because it was thought impossible that any heavier elements would ever be made. Elements 95 and 96, however, were created in 1944. Their discovery was not made public in the usual way—in a letter to *Nature*, or at a meeting of the Chemical Society—but on a children's radio quiz show in November 1945, during which a twelve-year-old boy asked, "Mr. Seaborg, have you made any more elements lately?"

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The Return of the Key

BILLY COLLINS

It was a drowsy summer afternoon,
hot wind stirring the papers in the room
and smoke slanting up from my cigarette
as from a tiny factory that produced only smoke.

I was reading William Carlos Williams,
growing weary of the note on the kitchen table
and the broken glass on the roadside,
so I reached into one of his small poems

and lifted out a tiny key
that was lying on a glass tray next to a glass tumbler
in a room of an inn where someone stood
in the doorway holding a suitcase.

I knew all things come in threes,
so I was not discouraged when the key
would not open the golden lock
on my daughter's diary,

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or the empty strong box under the bed,
and I knew I was getting warm
when I entered the orangerie
and stood before the birdcage on its metal stand.

Small wonder that the bird
fluttered up into the air
and circled the chandelier
as soon as the little door swung open.

Smaller wonder
that it banked sharply
against a background of windows,
then dove and disappeared

into the anthology of American poetry
that lay open on the table—
the key clenched in its beak,
the pages lifting like many wings in the breeze.

~ Billy Collins's most recent book is *Sailing Alone Around the Room: New and Selected Poems* (Random House). He has been appointed United States Poet Laureate for 2001–2002, and is a Distinguished Professor of English at Lehman College (CUNY).

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Big Bard

JOHN UPDIKE

O what a lark it must have been to be
Shakespeare—to face no copyediting,
to never blot a line, to spell a word
the way you wished, or wisht, just anyhow,
without a spinsterish consistency,
so future editors could spend a year
and quarts of ink deciphering what you
or swinish printers botched in a second's lapse;

to be a happy hack, and take the plots
that Burbage thought would set him nicely off,
and make them rippling spills of golden spieling,
with buffoon bits worked in for Kempe and Armin;
to rip off homosexual sonnets, yet spend
a Stratford weekend now and then with Anne;
to be adored by crown and groundlings both;
to be profound, immortal, smooth, and quick;

to be (to quote Ben Jonson) "honest," with
"an open, and free nature" plus "brave notions,
and gentle expressions" on top of "an
excellent *Phantsie*" and "that facility,
that sometime . . . should be stop'd"; to be the pet
of Harold Bloom and Northrop Frye; to sell
like mad in paperback, and outlive Marlowe,
and die scarce able to scratch your name—pure lark!

John Updike's most recent book is *Americana and Other Poems*, which includes six poems that first appeared in the SCHOLAR.

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The Public Intellectual and the American University

Robert Morss Lovett Revisited

ANTHONY GRAFTON

People keep telling me two stories about American intellectual life. I encounter them over and over again: in magazines, on the literary Web sites bookmarked on my computer, in the endless series of books and essays on the New York intellectuals of the thirties. And I'm impressed each time I encounter them by how rich and plausible they both seem and by how precisely they contradict each other. One of them is a sad story of the deaths of kings: the fall of public man and woman, as narrated by Russell Jacoby and repeated antiphonally by many others. The other is a Horatio Alger tale of success: the rise of the public intellectual, as documented by dozens of polemical articles, satirized in a number of academic novels, and confirmed, in the last few years, by the creation of professorships, research fellowships, and even a Ph.D. program. The American university plays a central role in both narratives: that of a villainous stepmother in the first one, a nurturing birth mother in the second.

According to Jacoby, the American public intellectual belongs to a threatened species—perhaps, like the whooping crane, a disappearing one. As late as mid-century, the argument goes, critical intellectuals congregated in urban centers. There they worked outside the official culture, lived in cold-water flats, and wrote what they wanted. Most of them had no specialized training in any single area of scholarship or science, could

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not count on a solid income, and followed no clear career track. But their lack of professionalism made them great. They created little magazines, like *Partisan Review*. They worked with small-scale, highly selective publishers, like the late James Laughlin of New Directions. They reached a small, dispersed, and bad-tempered public. And they exercised an immense influence, since they thought and wrote and were read as generalists. They tackled the problems that their contemporaries wanted to forget about, from poverty at home and dictatorship abroad to what made great American cities thrive or die. Then they presented their views in clear, lucid prose that anyone could read.

In the fifties and after, these unofficial intellectual communities faded away, even as the books their inhabitants produced became paperback best-sellers. More surprisingly, many of their onetime inhabitants were swallowed up by Leviathan, that great beast: the American university, which had previously paid them little attention. Many of them, of course, had gone to college, and a few—like Lionel Trilling and Delmore Schwartz—did advanced work and stayed on to teach. But the colleges they had attended, with their fraternity-centered, anti-Semitic cultures and conservative faculties, had offered most of them little more than access to good books and intelligent contemporaries. The official version of scholarship was backward-looking, dull, and unattractive. Most professors taught the young to count the commas in Congreve or to appreciate the beauties of Wordsworth—not to explore the fragmentation of experience in the modern city with Eliot, Joyce, and Fitzgerald. The canon of texts studied formally at most universities ended decades before the present, and only Anglo-Saxon Protestants of birth and breeding could interpret them properly anyhow.

In the course of their postwar expansion drives, however, university administrations offered jobs, homes, and money for periodicals. The once-proud outsiders joined faculties. But when they did so, they lost their individually privileged position and failed to produce real successors. The voice of dissent was drowned out by the louder, jargon-clotted voices of tenure-seeking scholars. Only meticulously detailed investigations of narrowly defined questions, their results presented in impenetrable jargon, could win preferment in the new system. *PMLA* outflanked *Partisan Review*.

Outside the university, the intellectual ecology was even less welcoming to generalists and speculative thinkers. Younger writers who wanted to follow their elders' example lacked the confidence and the general culture that had empowered the Dwight Macdonalds and Mary McCarthys of an older time. Public intellectuals went through a kind of reverse pupation: bright speculative butterflies turned into dull professional grubs. Even their urban habitat, the grimy cold-water flats that intellectuals had once claimed as their own alien, bourgeois-free turf, mutated into desir-

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able loft dwellings. The cheap pad of the fifties, once rehabbed, could be marketed to older bourgeois couples returning to the city centers they had left when their children were small—even as the former occupants, also suitably rehabbed, were marketed to their children as distinguished professors. Between 1955 and 1980, in short, intellectuals ceded the space they had once occupied in American society and culture.

The cries of alarm sound convincing. But every coin has two sides, and in this case the other one is shiny and attractive. Externally, after all, the life of the mind has seldom seemed healthier in America than it does right now. Magazines, newspaper sections, and Web sites dedicated to the doings of scholars, publishers, and writers have proliferated in the last ten years or so. In college and university towns across America, traditional and cutting-edge forms of cultural life flourish side by side. Readings, debates, and poetry slams draw hundreds. Even after college, intellectual life goes on. Membership in book groups has become as standard a life-cycle phase for the graduates of elite universities as consulting or paralegal work. Huge bookstores that hawk little magazines to Frappuccino-guzzling browsers have spread like H. G. Wells's invading Martians. They have appeared even in the suburban malls and edge cities where only a few years ago, the call of realtor to realtor was the only sound to be heard. Greenwich Village has come to Greenwich, Connecticut; North Beach has spread to northern Illinois. Meanwhile, the intellectuals' Nasdaq, Amazon.com's public sales rankings, shows that complex and demanding books can ring up high sales nationally as well as in sophisticated local markets like the larger university towns.

The American university has played a prominent and positive role in this drama of the intellectual life: it has encouraged some of its most original and productive minds to speak not only to their colleagues and students, but also to the crowds outside the iron gates. Trained—highly trained—in the arcana of literary theory or Greek philosophy, prominent scholars have descended from the real but rarefied world of high ideas into the darkness and confusion of Plato's cave. Even there, it turns out, they shine, like the stars they are. Empowered, not hampered, by their up-to-date interdisciplinary academic training, they have confronted the real problems of contemporary society, from the death dance of late capitalism that so many predicted in the 1980s (oops), to the rise of a state power that invades and reports on the most secret realms of private life (near miss), to the continued poverty and oppression in which most of the world's citizens live (bull's-eye). And they have wielded sharp new intellectual tools, forging new disciplines, like cultural studies, that demand the use of a specialized vocabulary. No wonder deans have rewarded them with high salaries and low teaching loads, the two signs of assumption into academic heaven.

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The new intellectuals have exercised a great deal of influence, since they think through and confront foreign and domestic, social and cultural issues that the rest of us would rather ignore, and publish their results for a wide public in magazines like *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, and on Web sites like *Slate* and *Salon*. These buzz with lively debates of a sort that had seemed, a few years ago, almost extinct. The university-employed intellectuals are not pallid conformists confined to the belly of the whale, but powerful thinkers and writers who have found a bully pulpit and use it to good effect.

Even the story of intellectuals and real estate has ended well. Livable, politically progressive, culturally hip university towns have grown into little centers of cosmopolitanism, their bright cafés resounding with jazz and swing. Absentminded professors spill latte on youthful high-tech millionaires; black-garbed students read their way into the new public sphere. The People's Republics of Cambridge and Berkeley, Ann Arbor and Amherst have become the lively present-day counterparts to the Baltimore of H. L. Mencken, the New York of the young Edmund Wilson, and the Chicago of Ben Hecht. The public intellectuals who adorn these institutions' departments of philosophy, English, and biology, and their programs in science and cultural studies, set the tone and choose the topics for discussion. And even the generalists who have not landed in academic niches—Paul Berman, Thomas Frank, and others—find enthusiastic support and young readers in the new academic community and on its outskirts.

I'm just a historian. I have no idea which of these stories describes our present situation more precisely—any more than I can tell you whether Amazon will conquer Borders, or whether all our books will dematerialize into electronic files over the next few years. But I can say that neither story does justice to the past—especially that of the American university. And I'd like to tell a story of my own, one that complicates matters in what I hope will prove a useful way.

Learned and original historians—David Hollinger, Bruce Kuklick, Dorothy Ross, James Turner, Daniel Rodgers, Caroline Winterer—have taught us, in the last few years, that the American college and university of the later nineteenth and early twentieth century were much livelier places than used to be believed. True, they didn't look like hotbeds of modernity. A new college culture took shape in this period—one primarily designed to produce a national elite of male Protestant professionals and managers and their wives, and largely financed by entrepreneurs and football fans. It served the sons and daughters of the well-to-do and those who aspired to join them. Naturally, its dominant note was nostalgia. The most ambitious colleges tried hard to camouflage their raw newness, and that of the class they were creating, by adopting traditional forms of architecture and dress, and inventing innumerable new forms of social and ath-

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letic ritual. But the resulting appearance of conservatism at all costs—which caused the maverick Chicago professor Thorstein Veblen to subtitle a book on American higher education *A Study in Total Depravity*, and led Upton Sinclair to title another such book *The Goose-Step*—is deceiving.

The universities became the scenes of powerful intellectual dramas, generated by professors and students who applied sharp new scientific, philosophical, and philological tools to fossils, Bibles, and society itself. Quadrangles that looked like dreams of distant Oxford showed that what had once seemed perfect, eternal sources of truth and enlightenment were actually the contingent results of historical developments that could be reconstructed, stage by stage. They spawned expert social scientists bent on observing and reforming the new urban world that they saw around them in Chicago and New York, and gifted writers bent on expressing a new world of sexual and social experience in a new idiom. To go back, even briefly, to the university world of the turn of the twentieth century is to take part in a forgotten set of intellectual adventures—and to gain a new perspective on all the tales now being told about creativity and crisis in the American mind. It's also the historian's natural way of responding to apparent contradiction: tell another story and you may, with luck, shed light.

Turn back with me, then, to the University of Chicago in its first years of existence, the 1890s. In some ways, the institution was typical of its period. Physically, it looked as if someone had managed to drop Yale or Princeton by parachute onto the midwestern flats. A monstrous outcropping of luridly carved gray-stone buildings, paid for by malefactors of great wealth, rose incongruously over mud fields that had been occupied only months before by the Ferris wheels, belly dancers, and Orientalist raree shows of the Columbian Exposition. Socially and culturally, the university resembled the other colleges of what Henry Seidel Canby called the Gothic Age. Obsessed with football, Chicago students eagerly joined fraternities, invented rituals and traditions, and filled the air with the plunking of mandolins and the bleat of freshmen being paddled.

Intellectually, however, the university set itself apart from the beginning. William Rainey Harper, the Hebraist who served as its founding president, set out to build a great center of research on the German model. He bought the entire stock of one of the great Berlin booksellers, S. Calvary, shipped it home—and only then applied to the trustees for the vast sum of $45,000 demanded by the bookseller. In the nick of time, nine donors stumped up some $28,000, and the books stayed in Chicago despite threats and lawsuits. Harper offered top salaries to attract the most prominent scientists and scholars from America and Europe. The immense sum of seven thousand dollars, then the summit of the professorial scale, attracted four great scientists from Clark University and even

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drew the great historian Hermann von Holst from Freiburg. Chicago students celebrated this last acquisition with a torchlight parade—clear evidence, like the salary involved, that the academic superstar and his or her perks did not come into existence only yesterday, as even well-informed people seem to believe.

No one followed all these developments with a more observant—or bemused—eye than Robert Morss Lovett, a young scholar of English literature who came to Chicago from Harvard. The scion of a modest Boston family—his father sold insurance, his mother was a teacher—he had distinguished himself as a student, writer, and editor while still an undergraduate. Edwin Arlington Robinson was thrilled when Lovett visited him, a lowly freshman, to ask if he could publish Robinson's poems. He described Lovett, in revealing period terms, as "perhaps the leading spirit of Harvard outside of athletics." As an undergraduate, Lovett had already plunged into the first wave of American modernism. His friends included not only Robinson but Trumbull Stickney, who sent Lovett brilliant, eerie poems and letters during the Paris years when Stickney drank absinthe, visited great writers, and researched his Sorbonne thesis on Greek gnomic poetry.

Harvard's President Charles William Eliot, who admired Lovett, hired him as his secretary. Lovett, in fact, might well have devoted his whole life to his alma mater—except that when he confided to one of his bearded, volcano-breathed professors his ambition to found something like the Oxford Movement in Cambridge, Massachusetts, this unsentimental mentor roared: "For God's sake get away. Go anywhere." That Lovett did, accepting, with many reservations, a position as secretary to the president of the brash new university on the Midway.

To Lovett's surprise, he flourished in Chicago. Though he saw through all of Harper's compromises and absurdities, and found the city's noise, dirt, and poverty depressing, he also came to admire the energy and creativity that the hyperactive university president shared with his city. Harper worked himself to death, teaching intensively, taking courses in other fields, raising money, hiring professors. When he took a break, he rode his bicycle for exercise, so slowly that Lovett could walk beside him taking dictation. Inspired by Harper's example, Lovett taught and took courses, tutored, lectured, and began to write. He made a name for himself as an effective teacher of English, a kindly administrator, and an intellectual. He found friends among his colleagues—among them the Harvard-educated playwright and novelist Robert Herrick, who shocked the staid Chicago public with a play about abortion, and the German-trained Renaissance historian Ferdinand Schevill. They drank seidels of beer in the German beer gardens that softened the austerities of Hyde Park until Prohibition was enacted. They ate together, sharing expenses to eke out their meager salaries, singing lieder after dinner while Schevill

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crouched tipsily on the radiator, remarking worriedly that "Je ne me sens pas bien ici." And they traveled together, spending sabbatical years in Italy, Germany, and France, where Lovett learned to see painting through the all-seeing eyes of Bernard Berenson. Walking tours took Lovett and his friends to Bavarian castles and Pius II's romantic, isolated mountain city of Pienza.

It all made for a pleasant, rewarding, bohemian life. These ill-paid young scholars enjoyed leisure of a sort that a full professor can barely imagine now: sabbaticals without e-mail, in the Paris, London, and Munich of the fin-de-siècle. But they alternated these years in paradise with longer periods of confinement at hard labor. Like the rest of America's male citizens in that frantic age of expansion and acquisition, Lovett and his friends worked fantastically hard when they were not on leave. Though not trained in the Germanic methods of philology that would soon capture Chicago's English department (and most others), Lovett turned out pioneering histories of English literature and studies of American fiction. He insisted—against the academic fashion of the time—that drama had been written to be performed, and could be understood only in light of the stage conditions of the time in which it was created.

Rather like Lionel Trilling, and some years earlier, Lovett treated the classics of nineteenth-century English and American fiction as explorations of the intricate workings of class and money. He tried to show that each new phase in the history of the novel reflected a new phase in the evolution of society. When "the loyalty of the lower to the higher class" made way for "another loyalty—the loyalty of the workers to each other," for example, the social novel of Upton Sinclair and others replaced Thomas Mann's deep psychological exploration of the decline of the old bourgeois elite. Like many scholars in this transitional period, Lovett devoted himself more to producing synthetic works that could be used as textbooks than to writing monographs and articles. But he knew a vast amount. Even his textbooks show his mastery of technical problems in bibliography, theater history, and other fields. So do his lecture notes and letters, carefully preserved in the archives of the University of Chicago. In the first great age of American scholarship, Lovett was a distinguished scholar.

The university of the Gothic Age—even the research-oriented University of Chicago—differed in vital ways from its modern counterpart. Many faculty members, especially the younger ones, nourished a deep affection for the institutions they served and the students they worked with. Their jobs were precarious, their salaries low, and their contact with students usually took only two forms: fast-paced, fact-packed lectures that their audiences desperately tried to memorize, and pedantic, nitpicking recitation classes in which they interrogated their hearers on trivia, hop-

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ing to catch the slackers out. Nonetheless, they saw teaching as a vocation. Though not the son of a minister, Lovett, like many members of his academic generation, came from a deeply pious family, and had been made to pray three times a day as a child. One of the most affecting documents in his archive at Chicago is the pledge that he signed on December 7, 1884, with other children at the Walnut Avenue Sunday School, to abstain from drink (a pledge that he did not keep). In leaving the church for another ideal world, that of scholarship and literature, Lovett did not abandon his sense that life must have a real end and a higher purpose.

At first Lovett seems to have found his vocation where most scholars did—in forming future scholars. He gave seminars on his fields of special interest and had the joy of seeing great specialists like Joseph Q. Adams, who became a famous professor at Cornell and the influential director of the Folger Shakespeare Library, emerge from them. "The first course in graduate work that I ever had," Adams wrote to him in 1918, "was at Chicago under your direction. The splendid training that you gave me in Elizabethan literature helped to determine all my subsequent work."

In time, however, undergraduates demanded something more: help and encouragement with creative writing. At first Lovett resisted, telling a student who asked him to teach contemporary poetry that "while we could teach the history and technique of poetry I should be sorry to have academic standards applied to anything which should be so personal and spontaneous as the writing of verse." But gradually student pressure overcame Lovett's self-described "distrust of myself and my colleagues in this capacity." A student Poetry Club took shape under his leadership. He arranged for the members to meet Harriet Monroe, Edgar Lee Masters, Padraic Colum, Carl Sandburg.

University teachers in England and America had been publishing collections of student verse for some time. In 1916, for example, Alfred Noyes, the author of "The Highwayman," edited *A Book of Princeton Verse*, which concluded with five short poems by Edmund Wilson. The volume of *Collected Verse* by the Poetry Club of the University of Chicago, which appeared in 1923, did not match the polish or sophistication of the Princeton collection. "Who knows," asked one young poet,

> Where my sight goes,
> What your sight shows,
> Where the peachtree blows?

Lovett himself admitted that he was too partial to judge these poems critically and praised only their spontaneity. But the contributors included Glenway Wescott and Ivor Winters, both of whom would make notable careers in literature, and Robert Redfield, who would make a still

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more notable one in anthropology (amazingly, Winters wrote the verses just quoted). And where the Princeton volume was published by the Princeton University Press, the Chicago one was published by Pascal Covici—a famous, genial figure, half entrepreneur of the avant-garde and half con man, who later moved to New York, where he created scandal after scandal in later years. Covici published Radclyffe Hall's lesbian novel, *The Well of Loneliness*, for example, and held some of the wildest parties of a wild age. The Princeton volume was the product of a country town, the Chicago one of a city; and Lovett soon made a specialty of helping his students find their way in the quintessentially urban worlds of journalism and literature. Covici was only one of the major literary figures whom Lovett mercilessly exploited on his students' behalf, and Wescott and Winters only two of the many young whom he promoted relentlessly even though their talents were more in the realm of potential than of actuality.

Other colleges had charismatic writing teachers—like "Copey" (Charles T. Copeland), who taught a famous course at Harvard, and Robert Frost at Amherst. But Lovett's practices and prejudices were unusual. He had inclusive tastes. His discoveries included writers as diverse as the novelist Meyer Levin, the literary historian Howard Mumford Jones, and the reporter John Gunther. The famous writing teachers of the 1920s and '30s normally looked for their disciples among young men with the sharp nibs—and sharp elbows—that would enable them to fight their way through throngs of rivals and reach the publishers' ear trumpets. Lovett worked as hard to further the writing careers of his female students as he did those of the males. He was the only Chicago professor who awakened interest in the young Janet Flanner, who would later become *The New Yorker*'s great European reporter, Genêt. And his papers include warmly affectionate letters from female writing students who did not become famous, as Flanner did, but who never forgot what Lovett had given them: the "help and encouragement and the fire that still keeps me writing through many reject slips."

American literary modernism took shape—so many contemporaries thought, and some modern histories suggest—as part of a revolt of the highly educated against the grinding positivism of the university literature curriculum. H. L. Mencken, for example, saw no connection whatever between the systematic social criticism formulated by Veblen in Chicago and the new poetry published in the same city by Harriet Monroe. Veblen he dismissed as one more "geyser of pish-posh," a scholarly eunuch unable to express himself except in parodically Germanic polysyllables: "The learned professor gets himself enmeshed in his gnarled sentences like a bull trapped by barbed wire. . . . He heaves, he leaps, he writhes; at times he seems to be at the point of yelling for the police." Monroe, by contrast, he praised, for promoting Sandburg,

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Robinson, and others whose work scandalized Presbyterians in frock coats and Baptists with low foreheads. None of the dreary pedagogues and "sterile *Gelehrten*" in the universities, Mencken held, could appreciate or further writing of this kind.

Lovett, however, saw it as entirely natural to help his immigrant, urban students write, bluntly and openly, about the modern city, in all its obscenity and passion—just as he found it natural, as a critic, to break into the big time with a *New Republic* piece in which he defended the "romantic decadent" James Branch Cabell because he had "remained himself" and defied "the herd instinct" that ensured propriety in American writing. It was Professor Lovett, rather than Lovett of *The New Republic*, who read a short story by a proverbially lazy Irish student named James T. Farrell and saw that it might become a novel. In the end, it turned into the Studs Lonigan trilogy, for which Lovett found a publisher.

Lovett, moreover, combined his literary radicalism with equally challenging and dangerous views about economics, politics, and society. The corruption and brutality of American politics, Chicago style, occupied Lovett's mind from the beginning of his career. He arrived in the city in the aftermath of the financial panic of 1893. During his first years of teaching, the Pullman strike split the city and the university down the middle. He and his friends watched the straggling members of Coxey's army of the unemployed make their dreary way toward Washington, where military action would scatter them.

From the start, Lovett said and wrote what he thought about Chicago politicians, police, and law courts. Gradually, his political horizons widened. After some years of living in European countries, for example, he developed doubts about the wisdom of leaping in on the side of chivalrous England and gallant little Belgium. In 1916, as the fever mounted, he agreed to chair a meeting called in opposition to American entry into World War I, even after all but he had fled the platform. Lovett did not demand that the United States stay out of war: his own son would join up and die in France just before the Armistice. But merely providing a forum for politically challenging discussion made him detestable to many Chicagoans, including a large number of his colleagues. They held a public rally against him, at which he enjoyed seeing himself burnt in effigy. The outcry didn't deter him in the least.

In the last year of the war and afterward, when the Palmer raids appeared to Lovett and other radicals like the beginning of a great repressive movement, he found his full vocation, one that enabled him to serve the larger community as well as the collegiate one. Lovett and his wife left the academic society of Hyde Park. They moved into an apartment in Jane Addams's settlement house in the slums, Hull-House, which they greatly preferred to the polite suburbs. Lovett worked the switchboard two nights a week and taught English classes for immigrants.

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He also began spending half the year outside the university, editing first *The Dial*, a literary magazine that published Sherwood Anderson, Hemingway, and Picasso, and then *The New Republic*, where he worked for ten years and contributed articles for twenty, not only on literary topics but also on educational experiments, the labor movement, and the persecution of radicals. It was here that he employed Edmund Wilson—and thus gave a start to another career more remarkable than his own. Lovett served for many years on the board of the American Civil Liberties Union. He joined and supported pacifist and pro-labor groups—many of them with Communist members—throughout the thirties. He denounced the American government, more than once, as "fascistic" and corrupt. And he risked physical danger and public humiliation while standing up for working men and women as unhesitatingly as he had courted snubs while looking for publishers and producers for his students.

In 1933, for example, the *Chicago Tribune* crowed when "Robert Morss Lovett, professor of English and literature at the University of Chicago, noted as a pacifist, communist, and radical, undertook to uphold the civil liberties of a group of apron factory workers and lost his own civil liberty thereby for two hours." Lovett had been walking a picket line with black seamstresses, who wanted their ten-hour day reduced to nine and their minimum wage raised to a frightening eleven dollars a week. The police arrested the white-haired professor when he insisted that the picketers had a legal right to occupy the sidewalk. With old-fashioned courtesy, he held the door of the paddy wagon open for the policeman who booked him. In 1937 Lovett sat in with striking auto workers in Flint, Michigan, waving his five shares of General Motors stock and introducing himself as a stockholder dissatisfied with management's concept of labor relations.

Lovett did not engage in these outside activities to win an endowed chair or a higher salary. Journalists and politicians regularly called for his dismissal—not a trivial threat in the university that had fired the young economist Howard W. Bemis for his criticism of the Pullman company. Lovett lost a college deanship that meant much to him (his four assistants resigned the next day in protest). Most faculty members, and most administrators, resented his activities. One of them, President Robert Maynard Hutchins, did not, and he defended Lovett with a ferocity that does credit to both men. In the mid-1930s, the Chicago papers ran a juicy story: the University of Chicago had finally decided to rid itself of its red English professor by pensioning him off. Lovett had in fact reached the retirement age of sixty-five. But that afternoon, an announcement from Hutchins reached the papers: the trustees, by a special, onetime act, had invited Professor Lovett to continue teaching as long as he wished. Hutchins, however, was an exception in this as in many other respects—he was, after all, the one president of a Big Ten university to abolish

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varsity football—and even he did not see Lovett's activism as desirable. For the most part, Lovett's superiors defended him only because they could do nothing else. Over and over again, prominent, conservative professors and donors who agreed with Lovett on nothing, but whose prestige and wealth the university needed, threatened to resign from the faculty or the board of trustees immediately if he were fired.

Lovett did eventually retire—to become secretary and acting governor of the Virgin Islands during World War II. And there, at the age of seventy-one, he still managed to stir up trouble. The Dies Committee, busy baiting reds while the heavens were falling, identified Lovett as a threat to national security because he had once, in a private letter, described the American government (and all others) as worthless. Congress deprived Lovett—and a couple of other officials—of their salaries in a rider to an appropriations bill, which President Franklin D. Roosevelt reluctantly signed. Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes insisted that Lovett and the others sue, and the Court of Claims and Supreme Court eventually threw the rider out as a bill of attainder, outlawed by the Constitution. Lovett himself did not even want to take the matter to law: as always, he had bigger fish to fry. He went off to be a professor at the University of Puerto Rico, where his old friend Schevill was also teaching. He hoped he could do something about bringing Roosevelt's Four Freedoms to that impoverished island. Through the fifties, as Lovett wrote his autobiography in retirement, he remained in hot water: for example, he was singled out by the eccentric Elizabeth Dilling for a long attack in her detailed study of subversion, *Red Network.*

Lovett wasn't always wise, and he certainly lacked twenty-twenty hindsight. He found it hard to see that the Communists who helped him defend Sacco and Vanzetti and the Scottsboro Boys didn't share his tolerance and humanity. And he wasn't always perceptive about literature. Stuart P. Sherman, a contemporary and more conventional critic, had a point when he made gentle fun of Lovett's defense of James Branch Cabell: "The principle seems to be that any author who has succeeded in offending the Comstock. co [an allusion to Anthony Comstock, self-appointed scourge of immorality in literature and art], should be stellified without further enquiry into the merits of the case. Or to put it in another way: If it is chivalrous to rescue a virtuous damsel in distress, how much more chivalrous it is to rescue a vicious damsel in distress." Like Mencken, Lovett sometimes defended the shocking merely because it was shocking.

But Lovett also had a number of virtues that the standard accounts don't prepare one to find in a plump white university professor of his generation. He had no gender bias whatsoever, except an old Bostonian tendency to assume that women are morally superior to men. His hero, his personal model—as he said and wrote more than once—was Jane Addams, whose Hull-House community he thought a model of what

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society should be. He liked and sought the company of immigrants and black people and working men and women. Lovett even thought students should have rights. He wrote numerous articles encouraging American undergraduates to become autonomous and politically self-aware—to devise course evaluations, demand independent student governments, and find other ways to take responsibility for their lives.

Lovett's scholarship, as he regularly admitted, had more breadth than depth. His writing—even his articles for *The New Republic* and *The Nation*—lacked the erudition, range, and punch of Edmund Wilson's. His stodgily delivered lectures lulled his classes to sleep. Nonetheless, in retrospect he cuts a compelling—even fascinating—figure. For he confuses and contradicts all the accepted categories. The little community of the campus, with all its rituals and its sometimes cloying conformity, remained one of his intellectual homes, and he never definitively pulled away from it. Lovett believed absolutely that to nourish the university was to contribute to the larger community outside. Younger writers and activists would not emerge by parthenogenesis.

Yet Lovett's commitment to the campus did not make him abandon urban literary and political life—even when he split the year between New York's magazine world and Chicago. Living in Hull-House, the Lovetts naturally continued to entertain students on Sunday nights—and convinced many of them that they should enter careers in teaching or social work. His students admired him unreservedly. One of them, James Weber Linn, who also joined the Chicago English department, wrote two stirring campus novels featuring admirable, if erratic, characters based on Lovett. The shabby, old-fashioned teacher at home in the gray city of Chicago's campus and the metropolitan intellectual in New York were of a piece.

Lovett was unusual, but not unique. Christian Gauss of Princeton—another deeply cultivated intellectual and politically progressive man—resembled him in many ways. So, for all their individual differences, did Scott Nearing of Pennsylvania, Joel Spingarn of Columbia, Lucy Maynard Salmon of Bryn Mawr—and, no doubt, many others. They combined strong political and civic commitments with wide-ranging scholarship, maintained their ties, as long as they could, to local intellectual communities and individual students, lived both in the harsh city and on the more or less idyllic Gothic campus—and played roles in the formation both of the research university and of the urban intellectual milieu of the thirties and forties.

The intellectual, in Lovett's day, did not have to withdraw from the great community in order to teach in the little one. And the university did not prevent all of its inhabitants from addressing the public good as well as pursuing technical forms of knowledge. Lovett's case shows that professors sometimes combined local action with global thinking, and

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managed to give their teaching, as well as their writing, a public orientation. Above all, it proves that both of the histories I started from—the tale of slow degradation and the tale of rapid, recent progress—oversimplify the past. Both insist on the separation of the university from modern intellectual life. But Lovett used the same social and historical method of analysis that he applied to literature as a tool for understanding and changing the larger world. He reached his public in many ways—sometimes by writing for little magazines, but sometimes by crafting widely read textbooks, sometimes by thorough teaching, and always by providing the example of his own civic life. And he was not alone. The past was not so simple as some would have us believe. Perhaps the present is also more complex than we think.

Nostalgia is always the besetting temptation of the cultural historian. And nostalgia is dangerous. The elegiac tone can induce paralysis, rather than inspire the sort of perpetual motion and creative energy that mattered most to Lovett and others like him. Moreover, the American universities of their time don't deserve unqualified praise—any more, say, than they would after World War II, when the G.I. Bill opened and transformed student bodies and faculties, even as Communist-hunters and despotic administrators fought to close them. Still, elegy may be an appropriate tone in which to recall intellectual lives like Lovett's. No one would have been happier than Lovett to see the American university as it is now, to learn that many professors are women and that classrooms are bursting with teachers and students of different colors, cultures, and classes. We do not have much to teach Lovett about opening opportunities or furthering talent. But he—and some of his contemporaries—might have something to teach us about what we could be doing and are not, in the classroom and outside, with students and for readers. They lived for long periods in the public eye, yet devoted themselves to small groups of undergraduates. They loved to write for their fellow scholars and for a wider public, yet they also believed that teaching is not just a duty, but a privilege. As much as anyone can, they practiced what they believed. That is why their story may serve a purpose that the two I began from don't, at least as historians usually tell them. Looking backwards to the old and unfamiliar world in which Lovett and his contemporaries worked and struggled might help us to evaluate and improve the new world that they dreamed of, and that we all too comfortably inhabit.

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Happy Trails to All

JAMES McCONKEY

Aided by our children, Jean and I made a trail through our woods a long time ago. It begins in a long alley between two rows of black walnuts, crab apples, and other shrubby trees on our land, and crosses a seasonal creek (originally we bridged it with boards spiked to railroad ties, but when that washed away we installed a large culvert) to make an erratic loop through the woods, with a spur leading to a glen near a ravine. A now-abandoned tree house is nearby. With the help of our youngest son and my namesake, Jim, I built that little dwelling in the trees almost thirty years ago, about six years after we finished the trail. We erected it between two mature beeches on the slope of the ravine—trees taller than most, for, unlike the other hardwoods, the beeches were never considered valuable enough to harvest. A larger creek flows over rocks sixty-five or seventy feet below it.

The tree house's interior is big enough to hold a couch for sleeping, folding chairs, and a bookcase. It has a pair of windows, one full-sized with a screen as well as glass, and two doors—one for entrance, the other for access to a railed porch high above the ravine. We built it as sturdily as we could, using redwood siding bought at a bargain price, the pressure-treated floor studs supported by beams a previous owner of our old farmhouse had stored in one of the barns—wood so hard that I had to drill holes not only for lag bolts but for spikes. Every evening, we calculated the length of the boards we would need the next day, for we cut the wood with a power saw at home, transporting it the next day the half-mile into the woods in a cart attached to a garden tractor.

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The house itself has lasted pretty well over the decades, though the siding has been scratched at, and nibbled, by squirrels trying to gain entrance. The weakest part is the green fiberglass roof, chosen for its light weight and the way it merges with the color of the leaves; years ago (but long after Jim had left home), I had to repair the damage to it made by a falling bough. I didn't want the tree house to disintegrate, for my wife and I still visited it for picnic lunches and occasionally, on a warm summer night, we slept there. Ultimately, in a violent wind storm, the upper part of the trunk of one of the trees, a section maybe twenty feet in length, was ripped off in such a way that the tree house beneath it had not been damaged. Now that the house was so fully exposed, I could see that it was at a slight tilt. In building it, we had used a level to make sure that the supporting beams were precisely horizontal. They now slanted down, toward the beech that had lost its canopy, and the strain caused by the change had splintered the beams where they were attached by lag bolts to that tree, making the tree house too hazardous to enter. I've heard it said that the trunk of a tree may grow thicker, but that its height upward is achieved only at the top: that is to say, the bole at any point remains constant, the lowest branches not growing up with the bole but simply dying and falling off as the upper canopy prevents light from reaching their leaves. And it is true enough that the barbed wire attached a century ago to the trees that separate the woods from the nearby field has not grown upward, though it has become firmly embedded within the widening trunks.

Still, I found it difficult to accept that trees grow upward only that way, probably because unconsciously I've always assumed a likeness between my body and other living things and I knew that my trunk had grown throughout my younger years, my upper limbs rising. Could it be that higher up, the boles of trees don't remain constant at any given point, and that the trunk of one of these beeches had grown at a faster rate? Either that had happened, or the woody cells beneath the bark of the other tree, maybe older and obviously less supple than its mate, had become compressed by the weight of the now-toppled upper section.

When I saw the damage for the first time, a couple of analogies occurred to me that favored the latter view. Surprisingly enough, my body also provided the initial one. Having achieved my full height and then maintained it for some decades, I began to shrink as I neared my seventieth birthday. According to the pencil markings on the kitchen door frame that show my height against the various heights of our three sons as they reached and then far exceeded that mark, I've lost an inch and a half, even though I have to buy shoes two sizes larger than I once did. The second analogy, which stems from the first, came from an observation that Jim recounted to my wife and me. As a college upperclassman, he had participated in an ongoing research project led by a Cornell

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dendrochronologist to date the age of old timbers in the Mediterranean region. Jim had climbed high on a ladder in Santa Sophia at Istanbul, to drill out a tiny cylinder of wood from one of the beams. The interior of that vast building gives the illusion of weightlessness, the golden dome above almost seeming to float above the windows that rim it. Actually, four arches support that dome, one at each corner of the square area beneath it. In entering the building, Jim had noticed that the bases of the columns under the arches had thickened: over the centuries the marble and porphyry of those pillars had been so compressed by the weight above that the stone was spreading out on the floor like wax.

Like anybody else's memory, mine is always at work, making analogies for the sake of understanding; but I suppose to another I would seem a fine example of vainglory for comparing myself to Santa Sophia while looking at that doomed little dwelling in the trees. Unlike Santa Sophia, though, the tree house was embedded in my life. As I was aware when Jim and I first chose that pair of beeches for its location, it was but yards away from the glen where he had hidden in the grass with Jean and me. In 1962, when we bought our already old farmhouse, we had lacked the funds to purchase much of the land that had always been part of the property; but by 1966 we managed, through luck and a new mortgage, to gain the remaining fields and woods. One spring afternoon, Jean and I decided to mark the route for the trail in our new woods before the concealing leaves came out. Jim—he was Jimmy then—came along, for he was still too young for the first grade. We left a note on the front door for his two older brothers to read after the school bus dropped them off that told them they could find us by following the strips of red cloth we would be attaching to the saplings and tree branches in the woods. Something as elusive as a transitory present feeling has often caused me over the years to remember that brief interval after Jimmy and Jean and I first heard the distant cries of the older boys, and then the sound of the twigs crackling under their feet as they neared the nest in the tall grass where we sat. How does one explain the extraordinary happiness it brought to Jean and me and obviously to Jimmy, whose eyes were shining? I've thought of it as a moment that confirmed our separate identities as well as the identity of our family; as a confirmation by the earth; as a fulfillment. But the three of us in the grass, having left clues to our location, were, as I have said, simply waiting. It has taken the passage of many years to give me the realization that the qualities I have ascribed to that interval were, and are, anticipatory.

For that matter, most of the other values I ascribe to the tree house (which in my mind always has commemorated that moment) also are anticipatory. They come far less from the uses to which we put it over the decades than from the evening hours that Jimmy and I spent drawing diagrams of its dimensions, buying or finding suitable materials (dis-

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carded storm windows, for example), and slowly watching the house materialize while we hammered, meanwhile imagining how it would feel to spend a night in the trees, or to sit on a chair on the porch, looking down on our domain of creek, ravine, and glen. Even when the structure was completed, we had a final problem to solve, for in Jimmy's eyes it was a little castle in the trees and, like any castle, required security while its inhabitants slept or were away—some equivalent, that is, to a moat and drawbridge. The dilemma seemed beyond resolution until it occurred to me upon awakening one morning that the answer lay in the long extension ladder we had used to construct the building. By reversing the ladder—that is, by attaching the wider base section far up the trunk—we could use the rope on the extension section to raise or lower it to the ground. Once he was inside the tree house, Jimmy could raise the extension, if he wished to; when he was away, he could lift it from the ground, throwing the rope safely out of sight on the little platform we had built before the front door. To retrieve the rope, we could find or fashion a fifteen-foot pole with a crook on its end—a pole he could hide in the underbrush while he was away. Having solved the final problem, we quickly furnished the interior; Jimmy felt it secure enough to fill a shelf with his favorite books.

As I've said, I thought of my body and then of Santa Sophia when I first saw that the tree house had tilted. Santa Sophia (Hagia Sophia, or Holy Wisdom, in Greek) had been built by the emperor Justinian to replace a previous Christian basilica destroyed by fire, and though its dome collapsed in 558 as a consequence of earthquakes, it was rebuilt in its present form in 563. Despite all the later earthquakes and political upheavals, it has survived as a supreme example of Byzantine architecture. Following the Turkish conquest of Constantinople—now Istanbul—in 1453, Santa Sophia was transformed from a basilica to a mosque. Its mosaics were covered with plaster, and four minarets were erected outside. (The original building, with the added minarets, became the model for mosques built everywhere else.) Presently it serves only a secular purpose, as a museum, with the mostly empty building itself the major attraction.

About forty-five years ago, as a newly appointed assistant professor at Cornell, I was assigned to teach a freshman English course that included among its texts Herbert J. Muller's *The Uses of the Past.* In that book, Santa Sophia serves as archetype for all the ironies to be found in human history. My son Jim was not yet born when my students and I were trying to speak intelligently about the ironies of history on Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday mornings at 8:00 A.M.; but years later, when Jim, now a Cornell student himself, was at the top of an extension ladder far taller than the one in our woods, he observed a contemporary irony taking

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place under the echoing dome of that austere but once-sacred edifice. A scene for a movie was being filmed; portable lights illuminated a young, scantily dressed actress and the lion whose leash she was holding. By the time Jim had climbed down, the scene had been completed, the lion coerced by its trainer back into a cage. The name of the film, the director told him, would be *Lion Man 2.* When Jim said he hadn't seen its predecessor, the director said there wasn't one, but that the film could be marketed more successfully if it was perceived as a sequel.

Irony comes from detachment, an emotional remove I didn't have when I climbed the tree house ladder for the last time. Opening the door, I could see Jim's old books, the propane lantern hanging from its hook, the fire extinguisher I had attached to the wall for an unexpected emergency, the couch big enough to serve as a bed, the chairs waiting to be sat upon. Everything was as it had been, but nothing could be salvaged; the splintered beams beneath the floor might break under my weight. The single item I could save was the ladder, which I brought home. Having never seen Santa Sophia, Jean and I might welcome the unlikely chance; but for several years I refused to go near the tree house, leaning as it does between a still-healthy tree and another whose top has been blasted off.

Like memory itself, which constructs images from the past, imagination depends on what is not presently before us, which suggests the intimate relationship between these two faculties. For Proust, the unwilled and thus wholly unexpected memory of an event is superior to the event itself, for memory, transfigured by imagination, can transcend time in these involuntary returns to the past. In their return, they reveal the eternal essence of things, bringing us the happiness that, however transitory, justifies and gives value to our normally mundane existence. He uses thousands upon thousands of words, in volume after volume, to communicate to himself and to us what is really beyond words to express, sending off in the process of writing his lovely and rhythmic sentences so many phosphorescent bullets, each gracefully arcing tracer illuminating (if it doesn't pierce) the human psyche, that I am ready to believe him when, nearing the end, he pulls the strands of his long narrative together by willing his narrator to reexperience a number of those unwilled moments that are beyond time. They explode in succession like fireworks, the fading emotions of one psychic display replaced by the next.

And yet, increasingly as I have aged (and I am now almost three decades older than was Proust when he died, his monumental merger of life and art not quite revised to his satisfaction), my unwilled memories are of moments or episodes that are—like that interval in which the three of us were nestled in the grass—anticipatory in nature. As such, they cannot be divorced from time, and so would seem distinct from, if not

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opposed to, the values of Proust's involuntary memory. Without the use of all those supporting elements that art uses to suspend disbelief, it is difficult for me—not a fictive presence but a human whose life journey remains exploratory, even now—to make plausible the single moment in my life that truly struck me as beyond time, and hence beyond words. It occurred one winter night early in the Cold War when nuclear annihilation was such a possibility that the phenomenal world became sacred, the smallest object (a deserted robins' nest, mounded with snow and illuminated by starlight in the bare branches of a backyard Norway maple) interconnected with every other object. But it had nothing to do with any earlier experience I was aware of, so it was not a memory transformed by imagination, and it brought no happiness then, nor does it now as I attempt to describe it. It was simply an acknowledgment by my mind of something felt in every part of my body, something so overwhelming that if I felt anything at all, it might have been awe or fright; but my words now only falsify that experience. It changed my life and gave me a voice as a writer, but I can't relive it. Because of my reliance on personal memory, I have been called a memoirist, though I don't consider myself one, at least in the conventional sense; for all I've ever wanted to do was to connect the ever-changing details of daily living to a lost but hardly paradisiacal moment that transcended time.

What I can and do relive without conscious volition are various seemingly trivial instances, some of them occurring more than a half century ago, remembered not because of what imagination today brings to them, but for what it brought to the actual experience. The heightened effect of all such experiences lies in a qualitative and wholly subjective possibility. It may be a contradiction of the normal definition of the term to say it, and perhaps I shouldn't generalize from personal experience; nevertheless, I think that imagination, especially when we are young, constructs emotions in advance of mental images—or at least refuses to envision them as more than a generalized mental pattern until it finds a specific image from the material world that is worthy of its emotional coloration and possible transformation.

For the past decade, for example, I have been remembering—in an almost obsessive way, but without the irritation that accompanies the unwanted recall of a commercial slogan or an insipid tune—two incidents saved from oblivion by the happiness of an elusive promise. Both of them are from my high school years in the Ohio village of Olmsted Falls—where, because my parents were divorced and unable to provide for me, I was living with an aunt (my mother's sister) and uncle—and both involve walking. In the first, I am walking with a friend down an unfamiliar country road, one devoid of traffic. We must have been walking for miles, for night has come and a full moon is rising. We pass

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through the shadows of roadside trees; distant dogs are barking, and the windows of the scattered farmhouses are occasionally lit, though I see no inhabitants within. The night is pleasantly cool. This is all I remember of that journey. I don't even remember who my companion is, but (having asked the surviving members of my small high school class, in person or by letter, if any of them remembers walking with me that night: nobody does remember) assume him to be one of those who have died. I think he and I had been given free tickets to the major league baseball game that afternoon (the games were usually played in the daylight hours then, at League Park in a crowded residential area on Cleveland's east side), and I believe that afterwards we took a streetcar to the end of its line, walking from there; but none of the factual details—including who won the game—have remained with me, only the happiness of walking through the moonlit night toward a goal. But what could that goal have possibly been? The ostensible goal may have been a Boy Scout camp, though I was never a Scout, since I have the vague recollection of a series of barracks-like buildings, all of them dark. I think we may have come across our physics teacher, who also coached the baseball team for which I was an outfielder, sitting on the ground and smoking a cigar. He may even have offered each of us a puff, making us queasy, but here I am beginning to embroider, for the memory is vanishing; and certainly no such symbolic invitation into adulthood has anything to do with the value of the memory itself.

In the second unwilled return to that period, anticipatory images have begun to form, but their vagueness is part of their appeal. This second walk, also at night, was a much shorter one, and the moon (if it was up) was hidden, along with much else, by a heavy fog. I am alone, on my way home from some unremembered event at the high school, and I am passing beneath the translucent gray umbrella of one streetlight after another, the streetlight immediately ahead only a dim glow. For more than a year, I have been a stringer for the Cleveland *Press*. Apparently I have the talent to write little feature stories about my community that put it with such regularity in the newspaper, sometimes even on the front page—articles that are reprinted elsewhere (and on occasion come back to me, however distorted, in such national periodicals for high school students as *The American Observer*)—that certain adults who reside in the village want me to enter their professions upon my graduation. One of them is the head of the Cleveland office of a major advertising agency who interviews me while we sit on opposite sides of an imposing desk, the polish of its dark surface gleaming in a band of sunlight. Another is the chief meteorologist in the region, whose office is high in a tower at the nearby Cleveland airport. He says that if I pass the civil service exam, which will give me no trouble, I can join him. It appeals to me, this thought of working at his side, writing reports maybe, and looking at

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white clouds in the blue sky or the stars at night as one airplane or another takes off or descends. Or I might enter the field of journalism: wouldn't the *Press* or some other newspaper be willing to employ me? Like the dim glow through the fog of the next marker on my homeward journey, each of these choices is such a romantic possibility that I am both free and heady with elation.

In his *Confessions,* Saint Augustine poses a famous question: "What, then, is time? If nobody asks me, I know; if I want to explain it to him who asks, I don't know." Part of the problem is that the present in which we live is, as William James and others have said, "spurious," for its arrival brings its disappearance. The seeming reality of any instant comes from past and future. Memory gives coherence—the weight of meaning—to the ever-passing present by relating it to the past; and, from its knowledge of that past, memory also lets us anticipate the future. I find it intriguing in this regard that some neuroscientists go against common wisdom by declaring that we have memories of the future as well as of the past.

I may be in my eightieth year, but I'm still trying to explore and understand my own psyche. It almost scares me to say it, but I consider my life so lucky that I feel blessed. I always enjoyed the work that supported my growing family: the first paycheck I received gave me a kind of puritanical guilt, as payment for fun. I love and respect my sons, their characters as well as their achievements over the odds (including the genetic ones) that face us all. I think that the attachment between Jean and me has deepened over the fifty-six years of our life together into the kind of bond that marriage partners can only promise each other at the altar. Despite the concluding words of the chorus in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* (less accurate than some though it may be, the translation that always comes first to my mind is "Call no man happy until he carries his happiness down to the grave in peace"), I told myself a number of years ago that Jean and I had won. So recently that I had already commenced this account, I came into the kitchen for a fresh cup of coffee and found her in tears. When I asked her the reason, she said that she had just been listening—the little kitchen radio, tuned to a National Public Radio station, was still on, playing at low volume a familiar melody—to Garrison Keillor's "The Writer's Almanac." He had recited, as his poem for the day, that well-known sonnet by Shakespeare linking love to the ever-growing awareness of mortality—to the knowledge that life, like a fire, ultimately consumes itself. "This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong," the concluding couplet has the lover tell his beloved, "To love that well which thou must leave ere long."

Later that day, she said to me, "But we have won, haven't we?" It was more a brave affirmation than a question.

Maybe only those who are embittered, who feel cheated by life, fear

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death. Neither Jean nor I fear the extinguishing of our own lives: but will the one who survives the nullification of the other's consciousness be strengthened enough by the past to feel himself or herself still a victor?

By winning, you obviously lose an enormous amount; but only a fool can complain.

In one of the clichés of academic jargon, a newly appointed assistant professor is said to be "on the ladder," if only on the lowest rung. If all goes well, he or she will be tenured and on the way upward through the ranks to full professor, and maybe ultimately even to a chaired professorship. Metaphors of ascension through time also exist in the other professions, even as, in regard to the soul, they do in the metaphysics of Christianity and other religions. Goals are the expectancies above and beyond us. The psyche—the human soul—feeds on anticipation, for the soul, I have come to believe, is either a desire or nothing at all. If it is a desire, then it too would lose by winning, of course. But as we age, the wondrous expectancies once found in the vastness of the future gradually transform into those that exist in the past. To provide it with nourishment and pleasure, maybe my own soul has led me—I see no other motive for such unwilled returns—to relive those occasions of walking (in the moonlight or through the fog) when anticipation was strong within me, however inchoate or unspecified the desire.

In the conventional image, a hoary Father Time holds a scythe in one hand and an hourglass in the other. As emblem of our fate, he is something of an automaton, a clockwork figure; when the last grain of sand leaves the upper globe to fall through the tiny aperture of the present moment into the lower globe, he will be activated to swing the scythe. Memory is something quite different, and maybe requires the hourglass to be turned upside down, with the past now representing its potentiality. Memory can't be born until enough grains of sand have fallen into its globe to form some rudimentary pattern of likenesses or analogies, either as feelings or images. No doubt a desire for succor from physical wants or spiritual needs accompanies memories so early in us they leave no later trace. In this sense if in no other, anticipation is born with memory itself, and so has its source in the past.

Swann's Way was once my bedtime reading; as a young man, I commenced it any number of times, falling asleep long before the child Marcel did. I'm glad that I didn't finish my reading of the entirety of Proust's vast work until I had completed much of my own writing, for far too many of the personal discoveries that stimulated me onward already existed in the later volumes of *Remembrance of Things Past.* As it nears the end, the first-person narrator says, "We can only imagine what is absent," something obviously true, and a little later he makes the famous judgment that "the true paradises are the paradises that we have lost," the

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truth of which has my subjective agreement. The novel here is undergoing the magical process whereby Marcel, a quasi-autobiographical character at best, is being transformed into the Proust who, at the end, ostensibly will begin writing all the volumes we have just read—a circling in time chronicling a search for a timeless essence that, even if briefly found, now can endlessly recur. Anticipation motivates it—Proust's own motivation, over the many years of its composition, to defeat mortality through art—and it's hardly surprising that his extraordinary achievement would seem to him, as he was dying, still not quite complete.

Most of us seek fulfillment in life alone, not in its fusion with art. However fortunate our lives, most of us will not know Proust's degree of completion; and since we're still alive at twenty or forty or eighty, we're by definition still incomplete. Fate, being anything but capricious, will intervene; maybe we establish new goals in part to thwart it.

One such goal is the seed of this essay, my words to be completed in its telling.

About five years ago, the farmland adjoining ours was divided into a series of strips to be auctioned off to the highest bidders—a common enough practice when a township has no control over land use. Jean and I have come to think of ourselves as guardians rather than proprietors of our fields and woods; and it makes no practical sense for a couple our age, especially a couple not engaged in farming, to buy fifty or more additional acres. To maintain the pastoral setting we love, though, we did just that.

The new land begins just beyond the tree house and extends into the woods on both sides of the creek at the bottom of the ravine; it includes the remains of what may have been a dam as well as an undulating mound or earthwork more than a quarter of a mile long with dug holes at each end that over the years gradually have been filling in. From the porch of the tree house, I once could see some of these archeological remains. Had the Iroquois erected a palisade on the earthwork, to protect a now-vanished village? Two summers ago, I persuaded an archeologist who was excavating the nearby site of a known Indian village to look at these remains; their meaning was beyond her province, and she suggested that they might be prehistoric. Since it was their mystery that appealed to me, I didn't mind her inability to solve it.

At any rate, on my seventy-ninth birthday, Jean asked me what I would like to do to celebrate the day. Without thinking, I responded in a way that surprised both of us. I said that what I would most like to do was once again to take strips of cloth into the woods, this time to mark a continuation of the spur trail that now ended at the tree house. What I had in mind was to clear a trail that led more or less along the edge of the ravine, past the remains of the dam (if that indeed was what it was) and

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maybe a third of a mile beyond it—whatever distance it took for the land to slope down to the creek below. Her ready agreement made me happy enough not to mind passing that abandoned tree house, full of old possessions but without a ladder to reach them; and so we spent the day getting scratched in the raspberry and multiflora rose brambles as we surveyed, and then marked, the most feasible route.

In the following weeks and months, as the weather and our inclination permitted, we used a chain saw and pruning shears to extend the trail to the creek. We built two small bridges over muddy places where in spring and fall the rivulets run. It's been strenuous but playful work—maybe the American equivalent of constructing an English folly. I had thought only Jean and I enjoyed our woods, and so was twice surprised by bearded men of roughly my age who knocked at the door. Each of them lived at least a mile away; each had come to compliment us on the attractiveness of the trail, especially of its bridges, and to offer his help if we wished to continue it onward. I imagine that both have been retired from their occupations for a long time, and that hunting is now their major interest; still, the thought of making trails obviously appealed to the child in each of them.

I was flattered by their praise, and said I'd phone them if we needed help. On the creek bank opposite the present terminus of the trail, an opening in the woods is the only indication that an earlier path might have gone that way. If so, the route (after skirting the largest and most beautiful bed of myrtle I've ever seen in the wild) would have headed back in the general direction of the earthwork that humans made long ago, for reasons known only to them. The goal I have in mind is to construct a trail that leads there, on the opposite side of the ravine from the tree house, which may have collapsed by the time we get there. It will represent, I suppose, that kind of circling available to us, one that returns the ever-moving present to a past that existed long before we were born.

We're in no hurry to get there.

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Boaz Asleep

VICTOR HUGO
translated by Brooks Haxton

Boaz, overcome with weariness, by torchlight
made his pallet on the threshing floor
where all day he had worked, and now he slept
among the bushels of threshed wheat.

The old man owned wheat fields and barley,
and though he was rich, he was still fair-minded.
No filth soured the sweetness of his well.
No hot iron of torture whitened in his forge.

His beard was silver as a brook in April.
He bound sheaves without the strain of hate
or envy. He saw gleaners pass, and said,
Let handfuls of the fat ears fall to them.

The man's mind, clear of untoward feeling,
clothed itself in candor. He wore clean robes.
His heaped granaries spilled over always
toward the poor, no less than public fountains.

Boaz did well by his workers and by kinsmen.
He was generous, and moderate. Women held him
worthier than younger men, for youth is handsome,
but to him in his old age came greatness.

An old man, nearing his first source, may find
the timelessness beyond times of trouble.
And though fire burned in young men's eyes,
to Ruth the eyes of Boaz shone clear light.

So, Boaz slept among his heaps of grain
in darkness, as among the ruins of summer.
Reapers sprawled nearby like fallen troops.
And this took place in very ancient time.

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Then, judges led the tribes of Israel.
People wandering with tents as herdsmen saw
the footprints left by giants where the earth
was soft still from the waters of the flood.

As Jacob slept, as Joseph slept,
so now did Boaz on his threshing floor,
while overhead a door came open, and a dream
fell from the sky into the old man's mind:

he saw a live oak grow out of his belly
far up into the blue; and many people
climbed it in a long chain, while a king sat
singing at the root, and a god died at the crown.

And Boaz murmured, sleeping,
in his soul: Could this come forth
from me, past eighty? Still,
I have no son. I have no wife.

The one who shared my bed, Lord! years ago
you took from my house into yours,
though she and I are yet one soul—hers
half-alive in me and mine half-dead in her.

And shall a nation come from this ruined flesh?
Shall I now have a child? I might believe it,
young, when I could still see mornings
rise out of the night as if in triumph.

Now, I tremble like a birch in winter.
Old, a widower, alone at nightfall,
I have turned my soul to face the grave,
an old ox turned by thirst down to the river.

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So said Boaz in his dream, his ecstasy still
turning him toward God, eyes blurred with sleep.
The cedar does not feel the rose bloom at its root,
and Boaz did not feel, at his feet, the young woman.

Ruth, a Moabite, had come while Boaz slept,
and now lay at his feet, who knows what light
from what door in the heavens finding her breast
naked, tender to its stirring as his dreams.

But Boaz did not know Ruth came to him,
and Ruth did not know what God asked of her.
The night breathed out a freshness from wild
clumps of asphodels over the hills of Judah.

The dark was nuptial, and august, and solemn.
Hidden angels must have hovered over them,
for Ruth saw in the night sky, here and there,
a dark blue movement like a wing.

The breath of Boaz sleeping mixed
with a dull hush of brookwater in the moss.
It was the time of year when lilies open
and let go their sweetness on the hills.

Ruth was dreaming. Boaz slept. The grass looked black.
And little bells of sheep were trembling on the verge
of silence. Goodness came down clear as starlight
into the great calm where the lions go to drink.

All slept, all, from Ur to Bethlehem.
The stars enameled the deep black of the sky.
A narrow crescent in the low dark
of the West shone, while Ruth wondered,

lying still now, eyes half opened,
under the twingeing of their lids, what god
of the eternal summer passing dropped
his golden scythe there in that field of stars.

Victor Hugo's poem "*Booz endormi*," based on the third chapter of the Book of Ruth, was written on May 1, 1859. *Selected Poems* by Victor Hugo, translated by Brooks Haxton, will be published for the Hugo bicentennial in February 2002. Haxton's new collection of original poems, *Nakedness, Death, and the Number Zero*, will be published this fall.

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Why Smart People Believe in God

ARTHUR KRYSTAL

Lately, I have been mulling over my relationship to God. Well, not mine exactly, but other people's. And, to be honest, I wouldn't be doing any mulling at all if these were not triple-crème-Brie, subtitled-films, PBS, *New York Review of Books* people (they may not have read Darwin, but they've read Stephen Jay Gould on Darwin); people who routinely vote the Democratic ticket, scoff at evangelical preachers, cast an ironic eye on conceptual art, and, all the same, can look me in the eye and say, "I am not alone." And when they do, I wonder what trick of temperament allows them such certainty and keeps me outside this particular existential loop. It's a pretty futile business, of course, talking about religion, especially if it is someone else's. The best remark (and wisest course of action) on the subject that I know was rendered by H. L. Mencken: "We must respect the other fellow's religion, but only in the sense and to the extent that we respect his theory that his wife is beautiful and his children smart."

It's easy enough to understand why people want to believe, but actually to believe with one's whole heart and mind in divine grace—that to me is a true miracle. And now that I am entering the Viagra years, it seems natural, to tweak a phrase, to sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of gods. Please don't be misled: I may have my share of metaphysical pathos, but it's not as if the eternal silence of infinite spaces troubles me overmuch. What's agitating me is religion envy, an unjustifiable resentment of intelligent and skeptical people—I almost said "people who ought to know better"—who swim effortlessly toward

Arthur Krystal's most recent contribution to the SCHOLAR was "What Do You Know?" (Spring 1999). A book of his essays is due from Yale University Press next year.

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the sanctity of dry land, while others, like myself, spiritually adrift, seem unable to strike out for shore. I don't mind admitting that I am flummoxed by their groundedness, their conviction, their serenity.

You can read an awful lot of books on the subject of God, from the simpleminded tracts that posit His existence on the basis of our existence to the searching arguments put forward by learned theologians (who seem to be mostly Swiss or German: Barth, Buber, Bultmann, Tillich, Küng), for whom God is not just a reflex when death comes tapping. Whatever else propels such books, there is a common desire to view revealed religion organically, as part of the human condition. Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, the authors are intent on erasing the line between earthly existence and divinity, between history and eschatology. Making the miraculous plausible takes various forms: some pay out intellectual dividends; others do not. At one extreme, there are apologists who advocate strict adherence to Scripture because Scripture demands such obedience; at the other extreme, philosophers offer proofs of God's existence that often spiral into a Hegelian rigmarole of God as thought or pure essence in the process of becoming known-in-and-for-us as Absolute Spirit. There are also literary commentators like the odious Hilaire Belloc and the somewhat less anti-Semitic G. K. Chesterton, who profess their veneration for Christ and their dislike of those outside of Christ. And in our own day, such theologically minded novelists as A. N. Wilson and Reynolds Price continue to bring us the good news without ceding too much intellectual ground.

The millennium was certainly good news for the religious publishing industry. Last year there were 2,657 titles of a general religious nature, a few of which migrated from evangelical Christian bookstores to the mass-market chains. Most weeks you can still find one or two books dealing with God on the *New York Times Book Review Paperback Best Sellers* list (apocalyptic warnings and personal accounts of salvation are the staple here), and even the vaunted *Times* hardcover list featured, for nearly two years, a book called *Conversations with God: book 1,* by Neale Donald Walsch. This is a country where God sells, and where an ill-considered remark by a public figure—such as Minnesota governor Jesse Ventura's characterization of organized religion as "a crutch for the weak-minded"—still merits headlines. Opiate of the masses religion may be, but it certainly doesn't dull our senses to aspersions cast its way.

One doesn't, of course, come to God through books (the Bible is confirmation of treasure found, not the quest for it), but through the realization that a higher power is responsible for individual existence, that one's life has no ultimate meaning unless it is enfolded within that power. Slowly forming epiphanies are just as valid as the vocal, blinding light that turned Saul into Paul. Yes, you can avoid Him your whole life, but that doesn't mean that the impulse to believe has been quieted. But belief in what?

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> Some say that we shall never know and that to the gods we are like the flies that the boys kill on a summer day, and some say, on the contrary, that the very sparrows do not lose a feather that has not been brushed away by the finger of God.

Here, tenderly put, in Thornton Wilder's *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* (with a nod to *King Lear*), is the crux of the matter: Either God is the conscientious foreman overseeing our individual tasks, or He (in the form of pluralistic gods) is the pantheistic creator who quits the premises once we've clocked in. If God is indeed a God who pokes His finger into the muck of human experience (so He's responsible if the Mets lose the pennant this year), then such a God I presume to scan. Any deity that enters into relations with such imperfect creatures as ourselves automatically grants us access. The God of tests and demands, the sacrificing-of-your-only-son, vengeance-is-mine deity who behaves like a spoiled king when his subjects get antsy or rebellious is a God I can take issue with.

If, on the other hand, God is an entity *pace* Nicholas of Cusa, whose circumference is nowhere and whose center is everywhere, whose divine essence is infinite, whose swirling galaxies, black holes, and burning gaseous matter are constantly being replenished, and whose very nature is indistinguishable from the cosmic pinball machine that we see only a corner of (He, being, of course, both game and sole player), then the question properly becomes: Why would this boundless, never-ending, self-perpetuating, worlds-upon-worlds God pay attention to *us?* No way that this ineffable, overarching force would make a covenant with Abraham, reveal itself to Moses, visit Mary, or require our breathless adoration. Herein lies the implicit heresy in Giordano Bruno's likening of God to an infinite geometry, a view of the universe that, along with other semi-mystical persuasions, led to his auto-da-fé in 1600.

There is, of course, no contradiction in a God of infinite spaces and of a localized region in space. If He's everywhere, then He's also got to be right here. Logically, this is correct; emotionally, though, it doesn't compute. To say it again: Why would the God whose reach exceeds our grasp by billions of light-years give any thought to the likes of us? All of human history is not the width of a fraction of a hair compared with the history of the universe. But who can conceive it? Who would want to? Most of us, in fact, don't. For all the talk of His grandeur, the true believer tends to see God as a stern but loving paterfamilias, ready to lend a helping hand or smite His children with same should they merit it. Fundamentalists of every stripe are like the provincial inhabitants of small villages in out-of-the-way places. They spend their lives in a Kentucky hollow or a Tuscan hill town, where the greater world—apart from the occasional overhead plane or TV show—makes few inroads. They have their work, their families, their friends, and when they find themselves in trouble, they turn to

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the local magistrate. If it's a spiritual problem, there is always Scripture. To such people, whose devotion to Pat Robertson, the Pope, the rebbe, or the ayatollah is absolute, God is essentially the Mayor of the planet. And though I'm tempted to write off everyone who believes in the literal truth of the Old and New Testaments, the Koran, and the Book of Mormon, simply because these are books written and translated by mortals, the fact that religious texts are the handiwork of fallible men and women does not by itself disprove the existence of God.

This God, the God of the book—there's no other way of saying it—is a stunted God, who apparently has nothing better to do than hang around our teeny section of the galaxy and amuse Himself at our expense by creating or allowing situations that, as the devout like to say, confound the wise. (Ask yourself: Why would God wish to confound the wise?) You may not be bothered by a hands-on God who lets loose with massacres and disease, but I am. You may argue that the often terrible and meaningless events inflicted on human beings, usually by other human beings, are part of His mysterious ways, but I say that the local authorities should be held accountable. The God of colon and cervical cancer, multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer's disease, pus, phlegm, shit, chancre, stillbirth, crib death, poverty, famine, war, pestilence, race hatred, paralysis, constipation, incontinence, child molestation, floods, earthquakes, accidents, rape, mutilation, botched medical procedures, death marches, Zyklon-B, despair, and suicide is a God who has a lot to answer for. He's got the whole world in His hands, and they're covered with blood.

True, He is also the God of natural wonders, of cloudless climes and starry skies, perhaps even of the occasional miracle, but if you're going to weigh the good against the bad, the bad wins hands down. The celestial bureaucrat who allows bad things to happen is, of course, the God of Job; and to pray to this God is, to my way of thinking, an act both futile and demeaning. It's like believing that the stingy and mean-spirited boss will give you a bonus for sucking up. The true believer, however, takes all this in stride and, should perplexity or doubt creep in, barely misses a step. There is, after all, an explanation. Sixteen centuries ago the existence of both God and evil in the world was reconciled by Augustine of Hippo, who, in acknowledging both, maintained that: 1) since God cannot be evil, the source of evil in the world lies within us; 2) this evil sprang from Adam's misuse of his free will, which led him to sin, a sin passed on by his descendants; 3) the same agency that contrives to sin is also what makes faith so powerful, since without free will (and the capacity to disavow Him), our devotion to Him would have no meaning. Thus God makes it difficult to love Him, because without such difficulty our love would be no more than the love a puppy feels for its master. Life then becomes a measure of our desire to reach Him, to prove ourselves worthy of Him.

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It is this God as Mayor who also figures in Pascal's famous wager in the *Pensées*: If God does not exist, but you conduct yourself as if He does, then all you stand to lose is a mere fifty years or so of having led a decent existence. Now, weigh this behavior against leading a disreputable life for fifty years and the possibility that He exists: The God-fearing life will be rewarded for all eternity, whereas the sinful life will be punished for all eternity. Given the risk, it makes sense to play it safe. And that is just what I don't like about this God. If He is small enough to feel slighted by my disbelief in His existence or annoyed by my unwillingness to play by His rules, and sends me to hell, then to hell with Him. If such a God exists, why would I want to spend eternity with the likes of Him? And if He exists, I hope I shall have the courage to tell Him off. Just because I may end up acknowledging Him doesn't mean I have to approve of Him. Call this—with apologies to Jonathan Edwards—my "God in the Hands of an Angry Sinner" sermon.

As for the notion of original sin itself, don't get me started. That such a strange, distasteful, self-flagellating view of human life has any currency at all is enough to make a reasonable person want to move to a land where Christianity is prohibited. I don't mean to make light of the problem of evil, but the truth is, evil is a Christian rather than a philosophical preoccupation. Without faith, the existence of evil isn't a theological problem at all; it's simply a fact that skews the idea of an absolute or perfect universe, a notion that Plato and the Neoplatonists were rather keen on. And with or without the Judeo-Christian God, isn't it reasonable to think of creation as perfect rather than imperfect, in which case how does the noticeably bad or trivial fit into the picture?

Equating God with the world while acknowledging the world's imperfections clearly required theological spin doctors of a high order. Happily for the church, such a man came along in 1225, and for sheer intellectual brazenness he is hard to beat. Saint Thomas Aquinas practically dares us not to believe. Things seem bad? Well, the worse they seem, the better it all is. Starting from the premise of God's limitless nature and unceasing activity, Aquinas deduces that "the perfection of the universe is attained essentially in proportion to the diversity of natures in it." Sounds kind of dry, but consider the implications: "A universe in which there was no evil would not be so good as the actual universe." He's also capable of arguing that simply because an angel is better than a stone does not mean that two angels are necessarily better than one angel and one stone. In other words, things are as they should be, or they wouldn't be as they are.

What, I can imagine someone asking, does any of this have to do with faith? Faith isn't about explaining logical implausibilities; it's about accepting a narrative that accounts for creation and that molds itself into a person's moral and emotional raison d'être. Belief in God is no more subject to doubt than belief in existence itself. But here, too, lies a prob-

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lem, since we cannot speak of God without endowing Him with human attributes, including the most fundamental attribute of all: existence. Six hundred years before the Council of Nicaea, in 325, officially wrestled with the problem of Christ's divine essence in light of his human existence, Aristotle surmised that existence can never belong to the essence of a thing. This concept, alien, I think, to many believers, was taken up by the twentieth-century theologian Paul Tillich, who followed it to its natural end: "If you start with the question of whether God does or does not exist, you can never reach Him; and if you assert that He does exist, you can reach Him even less than if you assert that He does not exist." Obviously, for purposes of explication, it's necessary to talk about Him in such terms and, less obviously, this is where our former president's hedging about the most basic verb in our language becomes relevant: If God cannot take a predicate, then His existence may, in fact, depend on what your definition of "is" is.

Arguments for His existence, however, can never be anything more than analogical speculations that the world requires a Being greater than it in order for the world to exist. Were such a Being to exist, the argument continues, the universe would conform to an elegantly laid-out plan, a simple and beautifully realized system of natural checks and balances that eventually would become apparent to scientists. Putting aside for the moment the question of whether elegance itself is absolute proof of God's existence, it seems to me that the peerless God who may or may not preside over this splendid but frameless masterpiece, who is both the process of creation and the creator of the process, is (once again) at odds with the Lord our God, who's made such a mess of things. This split in thinking about God goes back to the first two centuries A.D., when a group of loosely connected gnostic philosophers proposed that the God of the book was actually a Demiurge, who was Himself created by the True God, of whom the Demiurge is totally unaware. How's that for a kick in the head? The God to whom we pray is a stand-in, the unwitting buffer for the One of whom we cannot speak.

I doubt that many people try to reconcile these two visions of God: the amorphous unknowable Being and our resident *genius loci.* People drawn to God, but not to a specific faith, usually resolve the issue by opting in favor of the former and then trying to find links that bring Him closer to home or that make His unavailability more tenable. But the more ineffable the God, the fewer the links. If, for example, God is pure essence that does not conceive Itself to be, since It always was and always must be, then time cannot be a condition of Its existence, and we, as temporal beings, shouldn't worry our heads about It or it. But we do, and to what avail? Any argument you muster against the plausibility of His existence, any points you make about the contradictions inherent in a God both deistic and revelatory, simply won't cut ice with true believers. "The Son

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of God has died; this is credible because it is absurd," Tertullian wrote. "Buried, He has risen again; this is certain because it is impossible." No logic from him; no argument from me.

Why do I mention all these obstacles to belief? Not because these are hurdles the nonbeliever cannot surmount, but because they are hurdles the intellectually inclined believer *must* surmount. Saint Ignatius Loyola says somewhere that the sacrifice most welcomed by God is the sacrifice of our intellect. I wonder. Is the impulse to find God automatic grounds for dismissal of the intellect? Is the intellectual high ground reserved for the atheist alone? One of the reasons—perhaps the main reason—the secular thinker has problems with the pious is that he confuses the demarcation between atheism and belief with the feelings that the respective camps have for one another. Whereas the secular humanist considers it part of his job description to repudiate the tenets of religion, the thoughtful believer finds no actual disharmony between humanism and religion; those who believe do not necessarily believe *in opposition* to those who do not believe.

Although it would be foolhardy to generalize about the presence and intensity of belief in the general population, it might be fair to say that among intellectuals there is less soul-searching these days than in the century that witnessed the works of Darwin, Marx, and Nietzsche. Those of us disinclined to believe have grown accustomed to His absence, and we pay but a small price for our uncertainty or feelings of abandonment as compared with writers such as Dostoyevsky and Camus, who either wrestled with their doubts or expressed the dismay of the decision they felt bound to make. Which of our writers or philosophers today are tortured by the prospect of having to make a choice?

The problem of belief, which had once seemed part of the intellectual community's charter, could still be discerned as late as 1950, when Paul Tillich, in "Religion and the Intellectuals," felt justified in characterizing the response to the question of God as inevitably "negative-religious" or "positive-religious." The former, characterized by despair over the human predicament, accepts this despair and endeavors "heroically" through art or philosophy "to create a meaning of the meaningless." The positive-religious response, reacting to the same predicament, transcends it by "radically transforming it into a question to which religion gives the answer," not by the surrender of one's intellectual autonomy to biblical authorities (which is also a sign of despair), but by finding a religious answer "which does not destroy reason but points to the depth of reason; which does not teach the supernatural, but points to the mystery in the ground of the natural, which denies that God is a being . . . [which] resists the distortion of symbols into statements of knowledge which necessarily conflict with scientific knowledge." The positive-religious ap-

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proach, it would seem, can, unlike the negative-religious, both comprehend man's despair *and* express the "answers to the questions implied in man's existence and existence generally."

I think not. The human predicament, about which Tillich has no illusions, is simply not the same for those who believe and those who do not. However diligently the religious intellectual adumbrates a universe in which God necessarily resides, that universe (whatever the level of despair) is not the one in which the nonbeliever resides. The dichotomy is inescapable: for the believer, faith and truth are one word; for the nonbeliever, faith must be borne out by truth. There are, needless to say, any number of intellectuals, as opposed to professional theologians, who have accepted religious dogma of one kind or another. Few, however, have articulated faith with the forceful cogency of T. S. Eliot. Although Eliot wrote relatively little about his confirmation in the Church of England, he not only took it seriously, but took exception to the idea that humanism, being rational, stands apart from religion: "Most people suppose that some people, because they enjoy the luxury of Christian sentiments and the excitement of Christian ritual, swallow or pretend to swallow incredible dogma. For some the process is exactly opposite. Rational assent may arrive late, intellectual conviction may come slowly, but they come inevitably without violence to honesty and nature."

And they come because, sooner or later, we recognize that for a system of morals to be absolute, it must have a religious foundation—otherwise such a system is, by default, relativistic, based on cultural (that is, temporal) sets of values. Perfectly willing to accept the humanist's position that "the essential reality of experience is ethical," Eliot is also quick to point out that the statement cannot have the same meaning for both the religious person and the person who disavows religion. Just so there's no mistaking what *he* means, Eliot asserts: "Either everything in man can be traced as a development from below, or something must come from above. There is no avoiding that dilemma: You must be either a naturalist or a supernaturalist."

You could do worse than read Pascal's *Pensées* to understand why smart people believe in God. The wager notwithstanding, the *Pensées* strikes me as the most ardent and intelligent study of man's relationship to God that any philosopher has undertaken. Rereading Pascal after nearly twenty-five years, I'm prepared to admit that his anxiety is real, that his fear and loathing of annihilation make him as modern as any gloomy Sartre-spouting 1960s existentialist. I think Pascal really does feel the pull of Nothingness, but as a mathematician and scientist he also believes that man's dignity is bound up with the power of thought. And thinking forces him to admit that "the end of things and their beginning" are hopelessly hidden from him and that he's "equally incapable of seeing

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the Nothing from which he was made, and the Infinite in which he is swallowed up."

But Pascal's skepticism, if not his melancholy, is ultimately a pose. His despair over the disorder and futility of life never brushes a molecule off God's sleeve. He's a true believer in every one of the 923 fragments, and the paradoxical two-step he performs in order to convince himself that the heart has reasons, which reason does not know (# 277), recalls Nicholas of Cusa's observation that "there is no proportionality between the finite and the infinite." Being finite, Pascal cannot draw any conclusions about the infinite, so the possibility of God's existence is just as incomprehensible as the possibility of His nonexistence. Yet the world must be accounted for; and if the heart truly knows that God made the world, then reason itself is redeemed by Christ. This affirmation of the heart's wisdom is not, Eliot claims, a simplistic defense of intuition over intellect, or heart over head, but a shorthand for the complicated struggle that culminates in belief, a way of talking about faith as the fusion of feeling and thinking, in which "the whole personality is involved."

Eliot reads Pascal the way Pascal reads the world: he takes him on faith. The truth is, Eliot's commentary, far from being unavoidable, only bears out William James's dissection of the connective tissue between personality and philosophy. For James, the philosopher is always the whole man, "who like every human being of the slightest mental originality . . . is particularly sensitive to evidence that bears in some one direction." For what's it's worth, I believe this. I believe that we enter this world as interested parties rushing to a crime scene; we arrive with built-in biases and see what we're inclined to see. So, frankly, I'm amazed that intellectuals are convinced of the Mayor's existence, but I accept their faith, as well as their condescension toward people like myself. C. S. Lewis once compared the amiable agnostic's talk of man's search for God to that of a mouse's search for the cat. I like that, but not the idea that the cat is necessarily in the house. Although I am not, as you have probably noticed, an *amiable* agnostic, nonetheless I'd like to believe; I'd like to experience the peace felt by the *religieux*. Even the die-hard atheist must feel a certain pause when pondering the detailed fabric of the universe or witnessing the birth of a child. And when loved ones pass on, how can we not secretly hope that a higher power will look after them, and help us to meet up again?

I suspect that Christianity offers the best occasion for an intense feel-good religious experience. Christianity, after all, has the enviable fillip of a God willing to die for our sins so that we might enter heaven. To believe that God loves us so much is surely cause to return that love. This phenomenon of loving, or coming to, God is so widely attested that one would have to be somewhat perverse to ignore it. To see the delight on

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the faces of those who sing His praises, to hear the Mass at Christmas, to attend evensong is to feel more than anything else that one has been left out of the secret. It is also to understand that the devout do not simply believe in God, they *experience* God, and only a fool would prefer the pride of the cynic to such knowledge.

The wise, in fact, are not confounded. I take it for granted that clever, intellectually sophisticated people experience God as deeply as do ecstatic snake-handling Pentecostals. Faith is a personal matter, of course, but for the educated believer it may be something more. When a scientist, engineer, artist, or mathematician solves a particularly knotty problem, the resultant exhilaration is more than an egotistical reaction to having beaten the competition or the odds. It derives from discovering a pattern, from finding the missing piece that suddenly makes the work right, and there is something immensely satisfying in this. The same elation undoubtedly overcomes the rational skeptic when the truth hits home, when suddenly everything makes sense. The contradictions in the Bible, the lack of hard evidence, the existence of accident and evil no longer signify, because a world without God is even more absurd than a world with Him. Faith is where all syllogisms fail; it is overwhelming, deep, wonderful, and real—and it makes sense. The wise who have found God don't wish to understand creation in order to believe, they believe in order to understand. And I expect that it must feel pretty damn good. I expect that God gets certain people high in the same way that Nature or the Sublime used to get Wordsworth and Coleridge high.

Still, you have to allow others the right of refusal; some can't or won't inhale transcendence. The biblical god is out of the question, not because of intellectual scruples but because of a temperamental predilection to go it alone, if He is the alternative. "The one excuse for [this] God," Stendhal remarked, "is that He does not exist." What remains? Perhaps the possibility of finding one day that the coalescing, excoriating infinite geometry that has neither beginning nor ending will actually make sense to me. The thundering irony here is that although this is a God I could believe in, He's not One who's going to do me much good. Nonetheless, it is this God that those of us who don't believe, but would like to, must seek. And how do we go about looking for Him? "It is not when I am going to meet him, but when I am just turning away and leaving him alone," Thoreau wrote, "that I discover that God is." Well, Mister, I am turning away . . . turning . . . turning. Who shall catch me before I'm gone?

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Getting and Spending

Nostalgia for the Old Way of Reading Poetry

PHYLLIS ROSE

One night, during a dinner Alison was giving for her friend Doris, we were discussing Internet shopping, when a line from a Wordsworth poem came into my mind and out of my mouth: "Getting and spending we lay waste our powers."

Doris picked right up on it. "'Little we see in nature that is ours. We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon.'"

"'Great God!'" said Alison mildly. "'I'd rather be a pagan suckled in a creed outworn!'"

Doris and Alison, who met a lifetime ago at a get-together for girls from Westchester who were about to go to Radcliffe, are older than I am, but not much. It was possible that we had all taken the same course on romantic poetry, taught at Harvard in the years between World War II and Vietnam by Professor Douglas Bush. That would account for our knowing the same poem by Wordsworth, which Professor Bush found (it was one of his favorite words) "bracing."

"Professor Bush?" They both nodded.

I went home and found the poem in my yellowing, soft-cover copy of Wordsworth:

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The world is too much with us; late and soon.
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers;
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be howling at all hours,
And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn.

It is a sonnet, a fourteen-line poem containing three verse sub-structures: two quatrains (four-line stanzas) and a sestet (a six-line stanza).

The rhyme schemes of both quatrains are ABBA, A being the "-oon" sound and B being the "-owers" sound. I had said, "Getting and spending we lay waste our powers" as though "powers" were a two-syllable word—as Americans pronounce it. But for the English, "powers" is monosyllabic, sounding like "pow-z." "Soon powers ours boon." "Moon hours flowers tune." The rhyme scheme of the last six lines is CDCDCD—"be worn, lea lorn, sea horn."

The meter is iambic pentameter, which means, of course, that there are five "feet," or rhythm units, in every line. ("Pent-" is five, as in "pentagon" or "pentangle.") Each iambic foot consists of two syllables, with the accent falling on the second syllable. There are ten syllables in an iambic pentameter line—the basic line of Shakespeare, Milton, and the romantic poets. The rhythm is generally duh DUH duh DUH duh DUH duh DUH duh DUH, but Professor Bush taught us to appreciate all the variations of emphasis of which the iambic pentameter line was capable. For example, I feel sure that he would never have approved a reading of the first line, "The world is too much with us; late and soon," that reduced the rhythm to a predictable singsong in which weak syllables alternated with strong, like "duh DUH, duh DUH, duh DUH duh DUH, duh DUH." The first two feet may establish the iambic rhythm, but by the time you get to the word "much," you must certainly impose more weight. "The world is too much with us." Each word strikes like a blow. Slightly less emphasis on "us" and then a pause (called a "caesura"—a natural sound break) before "late and soon." The caesura further disrupts the iambic pattern.

the WORLD is TOO MUCH WITH us // LATE and SOON

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I learned from Professor Bush about "scanning" a poem—figuring out where the accents fall, working out the rhythm and emphasis, and representing them visually. An absorbing activity that sounds easier than it is, scanning is interpretive. One person may scan a line of poetry differently from another and both of them may be "right," just as different actors choose to speak the same lines differently, with different tone and phrasing, or pianists vary in their playing of a score. When you've spent time scanning a poem, you've thought about the poem's music, and you feel close to it in a way you didn't when you simply "read" it.

When you've scanned a line and depicted your sense of its music by marking the accents, you've made an X-ray of the poem's bones: it takes shape visually. In the line "The world is too much with us; late and soon" I see, when I've scanned it, a symmetry I cannot hear, though others, more acute than I, probably can. A spondee (a foot consisting of two strong syllables) is bracketed on both sides by two iambs:

duh DUH duh DUH // duh DUH duh DUH

The line is thus perfectly balanced at the center, with the strongest foot being that central spondee, "much with."

Sense and sound combine to break the line into three groups of words. "The world is"—subject and verb—is the first group. "Too much with us"—descriptive phrase explaining the subject and verb—is the second group. "Late and soon"—an additional piece of information, not essential to the thought—is the third group. The meaning groupings are symmetrical, as were the sound groups, but the symmetry is not exactly the same: the strong phrase at the center, "too much with us," is balanced on one side by a three-syllable phrase, "The world is," and on the other by a three-syllable phrase of inside-out mirroring accents, "late and soon." The caesura further separates "late and soon" into an afterthought or less essential qualifier. In both sound and sense, "too much with us" is scored for emphasis.

the WORLD is TOO MUCH WITH us // LATE and SOON

Professor Bush taught his lessons so well that I think I still remember his pointing out that this powerful line is constructed entirely of monosyllables. And not just any monosyllables—some of the shortest monosyllables in the English language. No word in the line contains more than four letters except "world," which at five letters seems (appropriately) expansive.

Wordsworth, the poet of simplicity, is writing here about simplicity, how it is gone from life, and how we are the worse for that. He is trying to restore simplicity to us by the sound of his verse, intended to be the cure

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for the disease it describes—having the world too much with us, being cut off from nature, having no literature that helps us to live joyously.

In the next line, the memorable "Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers," Wordsworth deploys abstractions in such a way that they seem more vivid than any mere example or specific instance. No, it is not clothing purchases that do us in, or car buying, or arranging weddings and expensive trips, or this job or that job, but the very notion of accumulating wealth and dispersing it again, "getting and spending." Listen to the sound of the line. Notice how three pairs of internal rhymes (assonance) mobilize it, so that energy builds into larger units than it did in the first line. The short *e* of "spending" reinforces "getting." The long *a* of "waste" reinforces "lay." The "ow" sound of "powers" redoubles that of "our."

The rhythm shifts now, so the accent is on the first syllable: GETting and SPENDing we LAY WASTE OUR POWERS. The first three iambic feet can also be perceived as two dactyls, a dactyl being a three-syllable foot with the accent on the first syllable: DUH duh duh. A dactyl is only one syllable longer than an iamb, a trochee, or a spondee, but it feels much longer. The syllables seem to draw themselves out so that we are tired by our "getting and spending." We feel dragged through to the line's conclusion in the thumping double spondees "lay waste our powers." Again, monosyllables for the points Wordsworth wants to make most strongly. He is shaking his stick at us.

(I was always amazed at how much Professor Bush would end up saying about life when all he was ever talking about was the sound.)

It's the rhyme, the need to find a rhyme, I hear him say, that now forces us on to the third line. The first two have been very strong and strongly end-stopped, which means that each iambic pentameter line contains a complete thought. What will the next line have to tell us? "Little we see in Nature that is ours." What are the strong words here, the words that are struck naturally when you speak the line? "Little" and "Nature" and "ours." How much emphasis to give to "see" is something each reader will have to work out for himself, but I would caution you not to swallow it entirely. It deserves a slight pause just before it, a savoring of the word. Notice the quietness of the line, the absence of hysteria, the chastity of tone. The longest words here are "little" and "Nature." The rest are monosyllables.

I have trouble remembering this line correctly. I tend to substitute the more melodramatic word "nothing" for the word Wordsworth wrote, "little." "Nothing we see in Nature that is ours" sticks in my mind, but "little," with its smaller claim, is the more accurate word, and, moreover, offers no competition to the important word "Nature," which this line introduces. Everything the poem values—simplicity, modesty, accuracy—

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centers on the word "Nature." Wordsworth wants no word as strong as "Nature" anywhere near it.

Now in another self-contained, end-stopped line, the four-line stanza concludes, "We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!" These are the first fancy words of the sonnet—"sordid boon," the first words at all "poetic." They have the effect (one might argue) of making the first part of the line even sadder and more moving: "We have given our hearts away." "Sordid boon," indeed! What would Professor Bush have said about that? My guess is that he would not have said a thing. Simply, politely, a New England aristocrat, he ignored the parts of a poem he did not like and picked up his lecture at the next line he did like.

So I would like to think that Professor Bush would have passed without comment over the entire second quatrain of this poem—over the image of the sea baring "her bosom to the moon," of the winds banally "howling at all hours," over the unvisual image of the same winds "upgathered" (whatever that means) "like sleeping flowers." He would not have mentioned the uninspired rhyming in this quatrain of "hours" and "flowers," "moon" and "tune," but at the last line of the quatrain he would have noted the elegant simplicity of "For this, for everything, we are out of tune" and passed quickly to the conclusion of the thought in the next line. This running-on of thought from one line to the next is called "enjambment," and Professor Bush loved it. I think he found it racy, this show of thought and meaning running impetuously onto the next line, the beginning of the sestet, refusing to be contained by the very structures the poem sets up.

> For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
> It moves us not.

He would have liked the effrontery of starting the finale of the poem, the last six lines, a little late, postponed, as it were, by the words spilling over from the previous quatrain: "It moves us not."

"It moves us not"! Four weighty close-hewn monosyllables. What could be more compact and more unyielding? There is an inversion, yes: we would in ordinary speech say "it does not move us." To that extent the line is "poetic," contrived. But how close it is to normal speech! How much it gains its power from the everyday language of everyday people! That is what Bush would surely have praised.

He could not have left those words, I think, without permitting himself a slight digression on the supreme talent of the romantic poets—Coleridge and Keats as well as Wordsworth—for portraying depression and despondency, those moments of gloom when the spirit fails to leap out and greet the object it half creates, when matter fails to be

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irradiated by imagination. Since they understood how much our subjectivity participates in the creation of what we call "reality," they understood, too, how great our despair is, how overwhelming our sense of bleak abandonment, when our own creativity fails us. He would have mentioned Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode," and I would have gone back to my dorm to read it, astonished at how a man who had been dead a hundred years understood my moments of despair. Bush might have mentioned that Milton himself had some great lines about melancholy, too, especially if you understood that Samson's blindness could be metaphoric and read the line "O dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon" as a description of a spiritual and emotional state as well as a physical one. He would have noted in passing that that line from "Samson Agonistes" was the kind of thumpingly Anglo-Saxon, bracingly monosyllabic line that taught Wordsworth how to write iambic pentameter. Wordsworth was the heir of Milton and the great tradition of English poetry. Bush would have had no problem using the words "great tradition" or "Anglo-Saxon."

Hear the Miltonic thunderclap, the cymbal crash with which Wordsworth opens his final movement: "Great God! I'd rather be . . . "

And now, extreme enjambment! What would he rather be? Press on to the next line and find out. Plunge ahead. Keep moving. Let's get some speed up here for the rush to the end. He'd rather be a pagan! He'd rather be a pagan??!! Great God!

We canter iambically up to the awaited word—the thing he would rather be—and find "Pagan," whose *a* is so long and receives so much stress that speaking the line is like riding a horse to a fence and jumping over it. Energy gathers. The line soars. Here we go!

And what do we find at the other side? "Suckled in a creed outworn." That bosom again! The one the sea bared to the moon back in the second quatrain. Here it's brought back before our eyes with a baby attached, nursing—the poet drinking in the life-sustaining myths of antiquity, myths that brought nature to life instead of quantifying it, seeing all matter as stuff to get and to spend. A living faith—the faith of antiquity with its nature gods like Triton, the god of the sea, or Proteus, the god of winds, the shape-changer—brings the earth to life for us. Our faith—the faith of commerce, business, numbers, trade—makes all nature seem like something we have to exploit and turn into something else.

"He knew that?"

That was one of my students, speaking up from the twenty-first century, thinking, How did Wordsworth know about the sugar fields and the Everglades, the Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance, the spotted owl and the Northwest lumber companies, the salmon versus the hydroelectric dams, the dying coral reefs, the disappearing frogs?

Professor Bush would not have felt the need to make this point. In fact, I imagine his distancing himself from Wordsworth in these last six

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lines. As much as he liked the music of it, he would, I think, have been embarrassed by that naked breast and would not have been entirely persuaded by nature coming to life as Proteus riding the waves or Triton tooting his horn. "Wreathèd?" Why describe the horn with a visual word, "wreathèd," when he wants to focus your attention on the sound? "Tinny" horn perhaps. "Deep bass" horn. What does "wreathèd" add to the sound? He might have pointed out how much more successful Wordsworth was in stating the negative than in stating the positive. "Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn" was the kind of line, stripped, unpoetic, that appealed to Bush.

That generation of English professors had minds so well stored with poetry that one line set them thinking of another, and they would sometimes move from poem to poem for the entire class hour without ever getting back to the real world. Bush would have found it hard to talk about this image of the poet standing by the sea yearning for a faith whose time had passed without thinking of Matthew Arnold's "Dover Beach," looking ahead to the next generation after Wordsworth, to another poet imagining himself on another shore (he wouldn't call it "lea") and seeing the "sea of faith" receding and "ignorant armies" clashing by night. Nor could Professor Bush, after the line ending with the poignant word "forlorn," have kept from hearing, in that greatly stocked anthology that was his memory, the words of Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale": "Forlorn! the very word is like a bell / To toll me back from thee to my sole self!" That allusion might have led Bush into another rare generalizing digression on the romantic Zeitgeist, which valued all things Greek—the art and artifacts as well as the mythology—and saw in Greek culture a path that western civilization would have been happier following, without bringing in the cares and complexities of Christianity.

A professor of literature nowadays might very likely point out that the same view of Greek culture has led generations of British tourists to the Mediterranean, ruining the very places they idealized. But that is not a point Professor Bush would have made. It's hard to imagine his reading *Tristes Tropiques*, or thinking that any mention of it, or of any cultural ironies, belonged in a class on English romantic poetry. No. It was more appropriate to quote Arnold's "sea of faith" and "ignorant armies," and Keats's "Forlorn! the very word is like a bell," and Milton's "dark, dark, dark, amid the blaze of noon," and thus—especially if you also took Professor Bush's courses on Milton and on Victorian poetry—the lines of one poet would resound in your head reinforcing the lines of another, and they would ring back and forth from Levin's course on Shakespeare to Bush on Spenser to Baker on John Donne, and back and back, like a carillon, and the generation of writers schooled by such men would title their work "Armies of the Night" and "Darkness Visible" and "For Whom

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the Bell Tolls" and "Tender is the Night" and "Splendor in the Grass," and the great poems of English would continue to be reinforced in your memory, the great lines singled out over and over as what Arnold himself called "touchstones." If you were not schooled in this tradition, Arnold's idea that you can tell great poetry because it reminds you of other great poetry seems almost ludicrous. But if you have these touchstones in your mind, you can sometimes, kind of, see what he means.

Wordsworth withholds the first person singular until the concluding sestet. In the first two quatrains, it is always "us," "we," "our." "The world is too much with us." "We lay waste our powers." "We have given our hearts away." "We are out of tune." But in the final sequence it is "I" and "me": "I'd rather be / A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn; / So might I, standing on this pleasant lea, / Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn." The statement at the end of the poem is daring and one the poet can make only for himself. While he can assume that others share his distress, he cannot assume they would go the same lengths for a cure—willing to give up Christianity itself, surrendering the one god for the many, the redeemed for the living nature, willing to give up all the comforts and benefits of modern civilization to live like a pagan, a life of astonishment and passion. But that's what he's saying. He'd give it all up for a sense of wonder.

"And so would I!" I want to say. I'd give up Tom Brokaw, *Survivor*, the Discovery Channel, *Law and Order, NYPD Blue*, even American Movie Classics and *The Sopranos* if I could respond to poetry the way I could in 1962 in Douglas Bush's course on romantic poetry. I'd give up women's studies, cultural studies, Lévi-Strauss, Stephen Greenblatt, and everything else I consider true and valuable in literary studies for the past thirty years to recover the excitement that went with the outworn creeds. I'd give up Xeroxes, e-mail, credit cards, cell phones, laser printers, fax machines, and global positioning systems if I could regain the concentration I was able to deploy in mastering the wisdom of the dead white men. But I can't. The world's moved on. We have to find new ways to startle the dull spirit—new scholarship, new art. The choice of being pagans isn't ours. And that's exactly Wordsworth's point.

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The Diamonds of Neptune

GEOFF SHANDLER

Not long ago, Laura Benedetti, a graduate student in physics at the University of California at Berkeley, and Raymond Jeanloz, a Berkeley professor of geology and geophysics, attempted to re-create the atmosphere of the planet Neptune in their California laboratory. Fifteen percent of that atmosphere is methane, the rest mostly hydrogen, ammonia, and helium. Benedetti and Jeanloz placed some methane in a specially designed cell, tightly squeezed it to more than one hundred thousand times Earth's atmospheric pressure, and then heated the crushed compound to approximately 4,500 degrees Fahrenheit. These conditions of heat and pressure mirror those found on Neptune. When Jeanloz and Benedetti turned off the laser, they found a clear hydrocarbon liquid full of diamond flecks. The implications were sumptuous and astonishing. Many of the diamonds formed in Neptune's atmosphere would be small—tiny motes of glittering dust—but others, Benedetti believes, would be as large as marbles. "Once these diamonds form," she says, "they fall like raindrops or hailstones toward the center of the planet."

Of all the assumptions a person might make when thinking about the universe, it is safe to say that among the reliable ones is this: There are no good days on Neptune. The atmosphere is a wretched fog—thick, resistant, and cold, like a crème brûlée mixed with ice cubes. Fierce storms plow across the planet's gaseous surface, their winds reaching 1,500 miles per hour—the most powerful ever detected in our solar system. Scientists

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once observed a Neptunian twister, known as the Great Dark Spot, that was as large as the entire Earth. The air is poisonous, and winter lasts for forty years.

When we think about diamonds, we may actually be thinking about many things, among them the ways in which we now try to make sense of our lives. Which is another way of saying that we think about stories, about loneliness, and about heartache. As is fitting for a place that rains diamonds, Neptune has rings. Just as fitting, the rings are sometimes invisible.

Cecil John Rhodes was a sickly young Englishman whose family sent him south to die. He suffered from a collapsed lung and a weak heart, and his doctor did not believe Rhodes would live past his early twenties. His father, a vicar, sent him to South Africa, hoping that his son would at least be able to expire in a warm climate. Rhodes was seventeen when he arrived in Durban, in 1870.

Until the late nineteenth century, diamonds had been found only in scattered Indian riverbeds and some Brazilian jungles. They were extremely uncommon; in a given year the entire world production weighed only a few pounds. But three years before Rhodes stepped off the boat, diamonds had been discovered in a remote region about a thousand kilometers northeast of Cape Town. The initial claims had been disputed and the find too distant to inspire an immediate rush, but by July of 1870, eight hundred prospectors were digging, and within three months that number had grown to five thousand. Soon, with the help of numerous African laborers and the invention of steam shovels, sackfuls of the prized stones were being gouged out of the South African earth.

Like the Klondike or the California gold rush settlements, the diamond fields of South Africa were places of dirty clothes and filthy faces, of chapped skin, yellowed teeth, and alcoholic reek. Most of the miners were African, and their workdays were long—fourteen hours in the summer, ten in the winter—and unpleasant. Even in the areas that yielded the richest diamond deposits, the ratio of diamond to dirt was one to three million. (That is, nearly three tons of dirt had to be scooped, sifted, sorted, and examined to get just under one gram of diamonds.) It was a job fit for compulsive gamblers and the desperate. Generally miners are both.

Years ago, while wandering, I attempted to visit the diamond mines in the Argyle region of western Australia. In an outback town I met a Japanese student who tried to convince me that we should buy camels and cross to Kimberley (an Australian mining town named after the South African city) on their backs. I declined, wondering if someone was playing a joke on him. I spent three days debating whether to take the next bus westward. I licked dust off my lips, counted ants, and thought of

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someone's hair. When the man who sat outside the gas station that doubled as the local depot mentioned that the bus west had been canceled, I nodded. He had a gauze patch where his nose should have been—skin cancer from the Australian sunshine—and I wondered that his sunglasses didn't slip down to his chin. The man asked why I wanted to get to Kimberley. I explained that the previous summer I had worked in a law firm, researching a case that dealt with potash mining. I told the man I had already visited the gold mines at Broken Hill, and thought the diamond mines might be interesting, too. He looked at me strangely. We sat for a while, in silence. After fifteen or so minutes, a bus appeared. It was going east. "Sydney," he said, tilting his head. "Probably a good idea." I nodded and picked up my bag. As I approached the motor coach, the noseless man spoke again. "I used to be an undertaker myself." Mines.

The *Voyager 2* space probe was launched from Cape Canaveral, Florida, on August 20, 1977. It weighed almost one ton and contained two computers more primitive than most of today's answering machines. There was a communications system and a variety of scientific instruments, including wide-angle television cameras, an ultraviolet spectrometer, and devices to measure magnetic fields and radio emissions. The visual systems were slow and complicated; to create a color image, they took multiple black-and-white images through different filters and then produced a composite. The two Voyager probes (*Voyager 1*, for various reasons, was launched after *Voyager 2*) carried their own nuclear power plants, since they would be traveling too far from the sun to rely on solar power.

Originally, the Voyagers were supposed to conduct studies only of Jupiter and Saturn, Saturn's rings, and the larger moons of those two planets. But as the spacecraft traveled across the solar system, scientists on Earth were able to reprogram both probes so that they took on greater capabilities than they possessed when they left Earth. Between them, *Voyagers 1* and *2* would eventually explore all the giant outer planets of our solar system, their ring systems, and forty-eight of their moons (many of which had been undiscovered before the Voyagers). The probes had been designed to last five years, but they are still wandering today, heading out into the vast emptiness.

What the Voyagers saw on their extended vacation was astonishing. On Io, one of Jupiter's moons, they found volcanoes, the first active ones ever seen beyond Earth, spewing plumes that rose almost two hundred miles above the surface. The moon Europa seemed to have a thin crust of ice above an ocean thirty miles deep. Titan, Saturn's huge satellite, had a thick, nitrogen-rich atmosphere strongly resembling that which existed on Earth before life evolved. Uranus, tipped on its side—probably because of a collision with a planet-sized body—displayed a weird,

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corkscrew-like magnetic field unlike that of any other planet in the solar system.

After Uranus, *Voyager 2* sailed on through millions of miles of void. Almost twelve years to the day it left Earth, on August 25, 1989, it finally encountered the planet Neptune.

On April 1, 1880, Cecil Rhodes founded the De Beers Company. The name belonged to an Afrikaner family that had once owned the land on which one of Rhodes's diamond mines was found. At the time, the South African diamond fields were full of competing enterprises, all of them furiously racing to uncover stones and bring them to market. The resulting boom transformed Kimberley, the center of the diamond rush. By 1885 it was the first town in South Africa with electricity, and its streets were lined with churches, synagogues, stores, and solid homes. But the South African boom was quickly imperiled, a victim—as is often the case with booms—of its own success. An influx of miners, dealers, and more advanced digging technologies had flooded the market with diamonds. As prices fell, individual claim holders and larger companies mined even more stones, hoping to sell as much as they could before prices sank further. Prices soon plummeted to the point where mining the gems was no longer profitable, or at least not as profitable as investors in diamond mines wanted. The solution, grasped by the young Rhodes, was a cartel.

Cartels involve several companies or countries that have conspired to regulate production, pricing, sales, and marketing of a particular commodity. A cartel bands together to become a sort of monopoly. Controlling the supply of a commodity, it can manipulate prices. For example, from 1972 to 1982, the countries that belonged to OPEC, the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, managed to raise oil prices from under four dollars a barrel to more than thirty dollars a barrel.

Rhodes knew that for his scheme to work, people would have to see diamonds as a paradox: an essential luxury good. Part of that perception—and the high prices he wanted to command—would be based on false scarcity. Rhodes would keep diamonds off the market, holding them back in De Beers's vaults. Over the next several years, he gained control of the entire South African diamond industry, ruthlessly buying out or forcing out competitors. With such command, he also solidified his control over the men who worked the fields, in particular the black ones. Regarding blacks as equals would, Rhodes declared, "get rid of the two thousand years that lie between us and the natives." The Africans were, as the South African press suggested, valuable as "labouring machines," and there was scant argument—certainly none from Rhodes—that they should be anything else. "We have got to treat the natives . . . in a different way to ourselves," he said. "We are to be lords over them."

As the South African diamond industry grew under Rhodes, Africans

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were denied digging licenses, could be searched without explanation, and were not allowed to move around a mining camp after eight in the evening. If found in possession of a diamond and without a satisfactory explanation, an African was liable for at least fifty lashes. Workers were paid, but were forced to buy all their food (and anything else they might need) from company stores within their compounds. The compounds themselves were patrolled by guards and surrounded with high iron fences covered with a fine wire mesh to keep diamonds from being tossed over the walls. Movement between the compounds and the mines was generally through underground tunnels. At the end of their contracted periods, African workers were locked in filthy cells, naked except for the heavy leather mittens padlocked to their hands. They remained like this for ten days, during which their stools were carefully examined for stolen diamonds. Lords indeed: as one of his biographers has concluded, "If anyone can be accused of laying the foundations of apartheid, it was 'that most English of Englishmen' Cecil John Rhodes."

Fourth-century-B.C. beads found in Yemen reveal marks likely to have been made by diamond drills; ancient Chinese documents refer to diamonds only in the context of their industrial uses. Pliny the Elder's encyclopedia described diamonds as good for relieving the effects of poisons, delirium, and unease of mind. Marbode; an eleventh-century Bishop of Rennes, declared that the diamond

> has aptitude for magical arts, indomitable virtues it provides the bearer, nocturnal spirits and bad dreams it repels, black poisons flee, disputes and screams are changed. Cures insanity, strikes hard against enemies. For these purposes the stone should be set in silver, armored in gold, and fastened to the left arm.

Such beliefs took hold, and diamonds and diamond symbols were worn into battle by such nobles as Henry II of France and Cosimo the Elder of Florence. As far as scholars know, however, the stone itself was not associated with affection until the fifteenth century, when the Habsburg emperor Maximilian I gave Mary, Duchess of Burgundy, a diamond betrothal ring.

Even after their discovery in South Africa, diamonds were perceived by most people as a wildly extravagant possession. De Beers worked closely with advertising agencies to change that. Well before 1948, when a copywriter coined for De Beers the phrase "Diamonds Are Forever," the company had encouraged middle-class couples in Europe and America to think of a diamond engagement ring as a necessity. The company planted newspaper stories and sent lecturers to schools to explain the importance of diamonds to marriage and the good life. It monitored the media for

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diamond references and lobbied for favorable display. (Nothing was too minor: in 1940, for example, De Beers pressured Paramount Pictures into changing the title of *Diamonds Are Dangerous* to *Adventures in Diamonds*.) Gradually, the notion of a diamond changed: not only did it stand for love, but the myth was also born that it had *always* stood for love, that the symbol was as steadfast as the stone.

What worked for De Beers in Toledo also worked in Tokyo. In 1968, fewer than five percent of the Japanese women who were marrying had received a diamond engagement ring. Four years later, after a barrage of De Beers advertising, the proportion had risen to more than a quarter, and within a decade the majority of Japanese women were receiving a diamond ring on their engagement. De Beers repeated this campaign in England, Germany, Saudi Arabia, and many other countries. Its success has been astonishing, though not inexpensive: De Beers spends huge amounts (up to $60 million a year) to advertise diamonds in the United States alone. But the cost of convincing people that diamonds are essential has been dwarfed by the return. Last year global diamond sales hit a record of $25.8 billion, the average price for uncut diamonds rose by 50 percent, and De Beers's earnings (coming off a record 1999) increased 87 percent, to $1.3 billion.

Whereas for most of its history De Beers controlled almost 100 percent of the market, the company now commands only about two-thirds of the world's supply of rough diamonds. Its declining share reflects increased competition from newer Canadian and Australian diamond mines, operated by large multinationals that—unlike the more easily cowed small dealers—have in recent years begun to work around the cartel. The recent chaos in West and Central Africa has also damaged De Beers. Warlords have taken control of diamond mines, leaving De Beers with the choice of buying the gems, knowing that the profits will fund bloodshed, or watching as its monopoly is further weakened. De Beers has done some of both.

One reason diamonds are useful for warlords is that they are so easily transportable: You could fit a fortune into your pocket. Were you to fill a large suitcase with rough diamonds, you could upset world prices for years. The fear is real. In 1898, a bricklayer named Thomas Cullinan claimed to have discovered diamonds about six hundred miles north of Kimberley. De Beers executives dismissed the report as nonsense. When news reached London that the Cullinan find was in fact the largest the world had ever seen, one of De Beers's chief executives had a fatal heart attack. (Without much delay, De Beers acquired control of the Cullinan field.) Even now, despite last year's record sales, De Beers worries.

Scientists estimate that Neptune contains enough methane to make almost two billion cubic miles of pebble-sized diamonds.

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That Neptune has rings was not a surprise, since all of the previously explored gas giants had contained such systems—Saturn's being the most spectacular. (Neptune's, composed of extremely dark material, are almost impossible to see; when *Voyager 2* attempted to photograph them, exposures of up to ten minutes were required to produce what were, at best, middling images.) Nor is it surprising that one of Neptune's rings contains bright clumps of debris, what planetary scientists refer to as arcs. But something isn't right. When speaking about rings, astronomers use the word "resonances" to refer to the gravitational interactions that can create areas of stability between different objects. Neptune's arcs should resonate with Galatea, one of the planet's eight moons, but they don't, which suggests either that gravitational theory has a serious problem, or that another moon—one we don't know about, despite *Voyager 2* and our best telescopes—is hiding somewhere. (There may in fact be more than one invisible moon, creating an extremely complicated system of resonances.) Another strange thing: While arcs are usually short-lived, Neptune's do not seem to be going away. They show an impossible loyalty, a companionship that scientists have been unable to explain.

The arcs are not alone in their idiosyncrasy. When *Voyager 2* swept by Neptune, it was able to examine Triton, the planet's largest and most interesting moon. Triton orbits Neptune in the opposite direction from all other major moons in the solar system. An outsider in other ways, too, Triton appears to be the coldest body in the solar system, with surface temperatures hovering around –391 degrees Fahrenheit—so cold that scientists had not expected to find any sort of geothermal activity. In Triton's polar region, however, Voyager discovered geysers spitting nitrogen ice into the sky.

At some point in the far future, perhaps as many as 100 million years from now, Triton and Neptune will collide. The concussion, destroying Triton and perhaps gouging out a portion of Neptune's core, will spew billions of fragments into the planet's atmosphere, resulting in the formation of a spectacular ring system, possibly exceeding that of Saturn. Thus, Neptune is a planet that seems torn between attractions, its arcs clinging together like mother and cubs, its biggest moon swooping closer, doomed, until it shaves from Neptune a glittering disc of jewels and rock and silence.

It took *Voyager 2* twelve years to reach Neptune, longer than it took Rhodes to go from being a sickly teenager to the man who ran the world's diamond trade. In Rhodes's day, the notion of crossing the Atlantic in several hours would have seemed as fantastic as crossing our solar system to snatch a tubful of gems. Cecil Rhodes knew that if De Beers was to succeed, it would have to control the supply of diamonds, no matter where they were found. "The world is nearly all parceled out," he once complained, "and what is left of it is being divided up, conquered and

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colonized. To think of these stars that you see overhead at night. . . . I would annex the planets if I could. I often think of that." It rains diamonds on Neptune.

In a recent survey, more than one-quarter of Americans said they were lonely. Since 1972, the proportion of Americans who describe themselves as very happy has fallen by five percent, even though the average American family earned 16 percent more in 1999 than it did in 1970. Similar declines have been seen in the percentage of Americans who describe their marriages as very happy, who say they are very satisfied with their jobs or housework, and who claim to be pretty well satisfied with their financial situation.

The point isn't that the numbers are large; indeed, one could flip the data and argue that most Americans aren't lonely or unhappy. The point is that the numbers are moving in the wrong direction. Almost paradoxically, as income levels have risen, so has discontent. A 1999 study in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* concluded that the higher the degree of economic development, the higher the rates of depression. The political scientist Charles Lane quotes a study showing that the number of friends a person has is a better predictor of his or her state of well-being than any other resource (income, intelligence, education, attractiveness, and so forth). And yet increasingly we find ourselves struggling to maintain friendships, buffeted from all sides by a sense that we must operate in friction-free environments if we are to succeed. A nine-nation study by Columbia University found that people born after 1945 are ten times more likely to experience depression in their lives than those born before the end of World War II. Though only one percent of women born around the time of World War I experienced severe depression at some point in their lives, the number has risen with every succeeding generation. More of us live alone than ever before, perhaps by unconscious calculation: attachment makes us a little slower off the mark when it comes time to move on to the next thing, and it is always time to move on to the next thing. Of course, quantifying happiness is not easy; it is probably impossible. But something is going on.

Cecil Rhodes's private secretary, a young man named Harry Currey, once made the mistake of becoming engaged to his sweetheart. Rhodes relieved Currey of his duties, despite his pleas that he could still be loyal to Rhodes. For Rhodes, only one relationship was important, and that was to the bottom line. Love, stubborn affection—these things were irrational and inefficient, and they should therefore be abandoned. "The closer one gets to Rhodes," one of his biographers wrote, "the more one recognizes a contemporary mind and contemporary methods." Indeed.

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When I was young, a friend and I once saw another friend whipped by his stepmother. She swung a thin, black leather belt. Before striking, she removed her glasses, placing them softly on a kitchen counter. She did not know that we were watching, hiding outside the window, listening to our friend howl and the leather snap. It was, in its way, more elegant and intimate than the whippings of Kimberley, where Africans' skin would be slit open by the lashes. A few weeks later we pooled some money, earned from bad junior high school jobs, and gave it to our friend so that he could run away. "What should we say?" I asked him, shaking his hand like an adult. "Tell them I went to Neptune!" he exclaimed. The next morning he did not show up at school, and we knew he was gone. We never saw him again.

Voyager 1 is now leaving the solar system, soon to be joined by *Voyager 2*, speeding along at a rate of 290 million miles a year. Both *Voyager 2* and the young Englishman who wanted to rule the world had been given only a few years to live, and both demonstrated surprising longevity. Remarkably, the Voyagers should continue to provide precious data for two or three more decades. Already they have provided an abundance of information that will help us do more than figure out how to exploit the natural riches of the galaxy, be they platinum asteroids, helium gas, or the diamonds of Neptune. What *Voyager 2* has told us helps us piece together our own place in the universe, helps us understand where we have come from, perhaps even where we are going. In doing this—in creating history—we are being human. The sociologist Richard Sennett has written that our sense of character arises from "the long-term aspect of our emotional experience. Character is expressed by loyalty and mutual commitment, or through the pursuit of long-term goals, or by the practice of delayed gratification for the sake of a future end." Character is thus much like storytelling. Narrative, writes the novelist David Lodge, "holds the interest of an audience by raising questions in their minds and delaying the answers." It is, in the short run, a rather inefficient system, something Rhodes understood quite well. An acquaintance once told him of his plans to become a writer. Rhodes was disgusted. "It is not a man's work," he replied. Writing and storytelling, in his opinion, were "mere loafing."

It is perhaps no surprise that when it came time for him to leave this earth, on the night of March 26, 1902, Cecil Rhodes died, without children or having ever been married, of heart failure.

In these boom times (and despite the recent dot.com downturn, we are still in the midst of a remarkable moment), it is hard not to think of ourselves as a bit like the miners who tore into the blue South African soil in search of unlikely fortune. This has been, and is, our diamond rush, and we are the "labouring machines." The difference, perhaps, is that many of the men Rhodes used were overtly

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exploited and abused. Our chains are subtler, and often self-inflicted.

In the past year De Beers has partnered with the French luxury goods conglomerate LVMH to create what will be a line of specially branded De Beers diamonds and goods. While De Beers has explained that this new strategy is a step away from its secretive operating style, the Oppenheimer family, which controls De Beers, concurrently engineered a buy-out of the company that removes it from the stock market and makes it, as it was in Rhodes's early years, totally private. At $18.7 billion, the public-to-private buyout was the largest in history. "It's almost as if the trade is going back to the days of Cecil Rhodes," wrote an analyst who follows the company, "when the 'Syndicate' was private, and everything was decided in private, closed-door meetings." So this, too, is a diamond ring of sorts, back to the days when a young man realized he could convince the world that a luxury good was an essential, while the truly essential was a luxury.

When I was a graduate student studying economics, we used to joke that what we were really studying was the love affair. This was not because we were Casanovas with slide rules; in fact, like most graduate students, we were hopeless when it came to things romantic. The joke arose from the time we spent studying triangles: triangles on graphs of supply and demand, of shadow prices and production functions, of X-inefficiency and money supply. But the study of the love affair, which is also the study of gravity and deeper resonances, involves much more than intersecting lines on a chalkboard. When we think about diamonds, we are thinking about heartache, and the economics of heartache begins not with triangles and graph paper but with the triumph of simple economics. It begins with a belief that efficiency in setting prices and distributing goods is better than a peanut butter cookie, a held hand, or a good snowfall.

Exactly how Neptune captured Triton remains a mystery. So too the ways in which we move through our universe. At times each of us is a Voyager, passing along, circling someone for a moment to study, to watch, before moving on. Or a Triton, orbiting backwards, edging closer, silent. And there are those who are comet-like, who swing by and into our lives spectacularly, sweeping us off our feet and almost away, into the outer reaches. Attraction is a funny, painful, and complicated thing. Perhaps along with the economics of heartache there is a theory of interpersonal gravity, one that calculates the resonances and the laughter and the moments spent distracted by the desire to see someone again, or those moments spent awake in the middle of the night, thinking about running away.

The temperature of Neptune is about the same as that of Uranus, but Neptune is much farther from the sun. This means there must be some internal heat source, though scientists remain mystified as to what it could possibly be. One of the most interesting aspects of Laura Benedetti's diamond experiment is that she may also have discovered an explanation of how Neptune gives off more heat than it should. The atmo-

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sphere of Neptune is thick, and the falling diamonds would produce a significant amount of energy through friction, which could account for the excess heat.

Stories are wretched commodities. For one thing, the value of a story can't truly be known before you hear it, unlike, say, that of a car or a bag of chips. And a story is nonreturnable; once you've told it to someone, you can't get it back. But if standard neoclassical economics tells us, as it does, that cartels are bad, perhaps there can be a new economics—an economics of the metaphysical, in which cartel-like behavior makes sense. Just as De Beers holds back diamonds so as to raise the value of those it releases, doesn't a good storyteller hold back more than she lets forward? She sifts through thousands of words, millions of potential sentences, shaping, crafting, stitching together events and memories and inventions in order to give us something that is more than the sum of its possible parts. Perhaps we each run a cartel of sorts, the cartel that controls our own storytelling and, in turn, the creation and preservation of history. Or many cartels, hippocampal and otherwise, sifting, reordering, stitching together moments to create a punch line.

As we lose our stories and complications, we become a place of terrific storms, of silence, without history, without warmth, where our real riches slump lonely and ignored. All around us are poison clouds of coins and bills, ad jingles and resumés. We become Neptune.

Of course, De Beers worked because of a story, a lie, a fiction. But in a Neptunian fog, it is hard to tell the difference between advertising copy and a confession. Sometimes I think about *Voyager 2,* gliding by Neptune, its camera lens open for ten minutes at a time, sucking in all the light it could. Five minutes and the rings of Neptune would have remained invisible, to us nonexistent. Seven minutes the same. And the colors, the gorgeous blue colors of the planet, also seen only by patient overlay of image after image. Sometimes minutes can be a lifetime. De Beers was right in a way: when we think about diamonds, we think about forever. Perhaps as we tell our stories, they create their own friction, warming mysteriously, much as the diamonds of Neptune warm the distant planet. And perhaps there is something to be learned from the irrational loyalty of Neptune's ring arcs. Friendship has never followed any sort of logic, least of all the logic of the market. Nor has literature or love or most of the things that really matter. Cecil Rhodes created the great cartel, but perhaps this other cartel—the cartel within each of us—is greater. It is a backward sort of system, one that celebrates inefficiency, nights on bar stools laughing, and bad theories about outer space. But still.

Somewhere in the universe there is a view of the constellations that matches perfectly the freckles splashed across your back. A gravity, a pull, a yank. An equation, a new math, too many odd numbers. The alarm clock sounds, and we ignore it. Have I told you how it rains diamonds?

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Socrates and I

CARL DENNIS

Faced with his decision after the assembly
Votes against him and he's led back to his cell,
I'd have listened to his friends' escape plan.
Still I'm glad he refuses, glad that for him
To fail in obedience to the Laws of Athens,
Even when they're applied unjustly,
Would be to slap the face of a parent.

It does me good to see him defining self-interest
In terms far wider than self-protection.
It makes me grateful enough not to contend
He'd have run off if Buffalo had condemned him.
I won't demote him to stowaway on a freighter
Bound down the St. Lawrence and across the ocean
To an island retreat perfect for writing memoirs.

The court that found him guilty might have voted merely
A fine and a reprimand if only he'd promised
To talk from then on in private, just among friends,
As I'd have promised. I'm grateful to him for his assurance
There was only one life for him, questioning everyone,
Putting the jury itself on the stand:
"Have you really decided, my fellow Athenians,
To abandon the quest for truth and embrace opinion?"

I don't accuse him of finding his chosen life
Merely a preface to a life beyond
Where the justice he loves wins out more clearly.
The questions he imagines asking the dead—
What's justice, what's piety, who's wise, who only

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Seems so—are the questions he's asked in Athens,
Though in Hades, it's true, he could talk without fear
Of interruption by wars, by mobs and tyrants.

In that regard Buffalo's an improvement too.
None of my dinners will be spoiled by the news
Rochester's joined with Erie in a pincer maneuver
And will soon be upon us. Our fleet is safe
From the fleet of Syracuse. Our sailors
Won't be enslaved to die in the quarries.
They can die in their beds, attended by friends and family.

The last words that Socrates says as the chill
Of the hemlock rises to his heart—
"I owe a cock to Asclepius"—seem, I admit,
Less of a bracing insight than a conundrum.
Why is it right as he dies to thank the god
Of healing for a recovery?
Still I'm grateful to him for his refusal
Of any deathbed magniloquence and feel obliged
To take issue with Nietzsche, who reads him as meaning
Life is a sickness, death a release.

"Can't you see," I say, "that he feels blessed
To be able to end his life
Just as he lived it, loyal to purpose?"
And Nietzsche, after pondering for a while,
Is inspired enough by his master's example
Not to grow restless, testy, or sullen,
As he contradicts me in my lamp-lit room.

Carl Dennis teaches English at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He is the author of seven books of poems, most recently *Ranking the Wishes*. His poem "Eurydice" appeared in the Spring 1999 issue of the SCHOLAR.

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The Reader

MARY JO SALTER

It was the morning after the hundredth birthday
of Geraldine—still quite in her right mind,
a redhead now and (people said) still pretty—
who hadn't wanted a party.

Well, they had won, though she had stood her ground
on no singing of Happy Birthday, and no cake;
next year, with any luck, they'd learn their lesson
and not be coming back.

My friend who tells the story—a distant cousin
and a favorite, allowed to spend that night
in the nursery of the Philadelphia mansion
Geraldine was born in—

woke to the wide-eyed faces of porcelain dolls
and descended a polished winding stair that led
like a dream into the sunroom, where Geraldine
sat with the paper and read.

—Or sat with the paper lifted in her hands
like the reins of Lazarus, her long-dead horse
that had jumped a thousand hurdles; shook it once
to iron out the creases,

and kept it elevated, having been
blind for the twenty years white-uniformed
Edwina, who is black, has had to stand
behind her, reading the news aloud.

Mary Jo Salter, Emily Dickinson Lecturer in the Humanities at Mount Holyoke College, is the author of four books of poems, most recently *A Kiss in Space*.

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Birding in the Dark

JONATHAN ROSEN

It is midnight and I am in a dry riverbed in the desert near Eilat, looking for owls. The stars are everywhere above us, glowing in their dark sockets. They are reminders of the divine promise—or the divine deception, depending on my mood and the state of my metaphorical imagination—that Jews will be a numerous nation. But I've stopped watching the stars. My eyes are fixed on a single spot high up on the cliff wall, a tiny ledge that my guide illuminates with a searchlight plugged into the cigarette lighter of our four-wheel-drive Audi. This is where the bird that we are hoping to summon with a tape recording, the rare Hume's Tawny Owl, is likely to perch.

I have always loved owls. Recently I read, in a twelfth-century bestiary translated by T. H. White: "Owls are symbolical of the Jews, who repulse Our Saviour when he comes to redeem them, saying: 'We have no King but Caesar.' They value darkness more than light." Perhaps this is why I take special pleasure looking for owls in Israel. Here I am in darkness, where the crusaders would have expected to find me—but I am, after all, in the Jewish State.

Crowing over crusader ruins aside, Israel is one of the world's great places to watch birds. In spring and fall, half a billion birds funnel over this tiny country, riding the thermals of the rift valley from Kenya all the way to Turkey. Israel is a magnet for birds for much the same reason that it was for conquering armies—it is a land bridge that connects Africa, Europe, and Asia. Israel draws birds in abundance from all three conti-

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Jonathan Rosen's most recent book, *The Talmud and the Internet: A Journey Between Worlds* (which began as an essay for the SCHOLAR) has just been published in paperback by Picador USA.

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nents and is second only to Panama in the density and variety of its spring migration.

For some reason, it took me decades to discover this, I suppose because my associations with the country had all been personal, historical, or religious. My father's sister came to Palestine from Vienna in the 1930s, fleeing Nazi persecution and dreaming of a new society. Though she died at the age of thirty-nine, she helped found a kibbutz in the north of the country, drained swamps, contracted malaria, and bore three children who still live on various kibbutzim and who have in turn produced children of their own. In my imagination the natural world had somehow been eclipsed by the man-made. Israel was a swamp that had been drained, a desert that had been made to bloom. I hadn't grown up thinking of it as a habitat of its own.

In *Biophilia: The Human Bond with Other Species*, the great entomologist E. O. Wilson recalled a tour he took of the Old City of Jerusalem. Not far from the spot where the throne of King Solomon is believed to have stood, Wilson got on his hands and knees to watch carpenter ants disappear through cracks in the cobblestones. As he walked past the Temple Mount, he made "inner calculations of the number of ant species found within the city walls." For Wilson, the natural past of Jerusalem—what he called "the million-year history"—meant at least as much as the mere three thousand years of its human past.

Birding is all about bridging disparate worlds—far-flung continents, the air and the earth, the symbolic and the actual, the scientific and the wild, the million-year history and the three-thousand-year history. Birding in Israel has rounded out my view of the earth. It has given me a way to reconcile Solomon's throne and the ants underneath it. Solomon himself might have appreciated this: The great king, according to legend, spoke the language of animals. But that was a long time ago.

Historically, Jews didn't care for owls any more than medieval Christians did. They associated the birds with Lilith, Adam's first wife, who leads men astray and causes nocturnal emissions. As a bird-watcher, I easily understand the link to Lilith—bird-watching is a sport for Peeping Toms. The day before my owl excursion, I watched through binoculars as two Egyptian Vultures—just arrived from Africa—copulated in the Golan Heights. These are fantastic, grotesque birds with ruffs of white feathers that rise to form hoods around their naked yellow faces. They look like sinister Elizabethan courtiers. My birds were sitting side by side on a rock, touching bills. Suddenly the male jumped awkwardly on the female's back in that hunching, vulturish way, as if she were a piece of carrion. A half flap or two to keep his balance, and then, a moment later, he was done, and the birds were standing nonchalantly side by side again, staring in opposite directions.

Jews feared more than the seductions of Lilith. In the Bible, owls,

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which roosted in the ruins of the Temple in Jerusalem, are associated with ghosts haunting the abandoned house of God. They are omens of loss and sorrow. The notion that owls haunted the fallen Temple moves me most of all because whether I find my owl or not, the ghosts of the Temple are everywhere around me on this trip, no matter where in Israel I go. It is early March, six months into the violence that began the day after Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount with an armed entourage. The Temple feels less like an ancient calamity redeemed by modern statecraft than like a grim reflection of contemporary reality—a reminder of the friable state of human aspirations, of broken alliances with people and with God.

Nobody wants to talk politics with me. The hotels are empty. Kibbutz Lotan, where I am staying, gambled on ecotourism—it has excellent guides and lovely guest houses, but it has been abandoned by the European bird-watchers it had begun attracting. My guide, the British-born birder James P. Smith, tells me that in response to the violence, the American Birding Association canceled a visit—and planned instead to go to the United Arab Emirates. But the sky is full of birds, as spring migration—witnessed by Israelites and Hittites and Jebusites, older than Jerusalem and Ur, older perhaps than human habitation of the Holy Land—gets under way. The contrast between the free flight of birds above and the people below, locked in bloodshed and history, is heartbreaking. Borders are everything to people in this region. To birds they are nothing.

"Migrating Birds Know No Boundaries" is the hopeful motto of the International Center for Bird Migration in Latrun, halfway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Created by Tel Aviv University and the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, the center is the brainchild of ornithologist Yossi Leshem, king of Israeli birding and its zealous ambassador abroad. He has created his bird observatory smack in the middle of the western migration route that runs between the Judaean and Samarian Mountains. The spot was a human crossroads for millennia, linking the road from Jaffa to Jerusalem and from Gaza to Damascus. Nearby lie the ruins of one of the largest crusader castles in the Middle East.

The birding center overlooks the Ayalon Valley, where Joshua commanded the sun to stand still while he defeated the Amorites. Centuries later, not far from the valley, Judah Maccabee routed Syrian forces in the battle of Emaus. Latrun is also the sight of the first armored battle in Israeli history: in the 1948 War of Independence, David Ben-Gurion ordered an attack on Arab forces occupying a British police fort here. Victory would have given Israel control over the road to Jerusalem and a way to break the Arab blockade that cut Jerusalem off from the rest of the

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country. (This was the first of three bloody battles that never succeeded—in the end it was the construction of the Burma Road, which performed a sort of end run around Latrun, that broke the siege.)

By design, the International Center of Bird Migration is half war memorial, half ornithological observatory. Leshem hopes to bring together the country's battle-scarred past with a utopian vision of its future. One hundred and fifty tanks serve as a memorial to the Armored Corps soldiers who fell in Israel's wars; the migrating raptors overhead and the radar devices that track them from the ground are emblems of a future without borders, as free as the birds.

It is not a propitious moment to imagine borders as porous as the air. On February 15, ten days before I flew to Israel, a Palestinian bus driver plowed into a crowded bus stop, killing eight and injuring twenty-six. On February 28, three days after my arrival in the country, a bomb was defused in a seafood restaurant on Allenby Street in Tel Aviv. The next day, a Palestinian terrorist detonated a bomb in the back of a taxi van traveling from Tel Aviv to Tiberias, killing one Israeli and injuring nine others. Before my trip is finished, a Palestinian terrorist will blow himself up in a shopping mall in Netanya, killing three and injuring more than fifty. There were no official Israeli responses that week, though an Arab worker was beaten by the crowd after the Netanya bombing. (Frankly, the birds aren't exactly to be envied. Migration is viewed as hunting season in much of the Middle East—it is possible to buy stuffed birds of prey, all of them protected species, in the duty-free shop of the Damascus airport.)

Yossi Leshem has volunteered to spend the day birding with me and, despite the tense mood, has planned a trip that will take us from Jerusalem through the Jordan Valley, up to the Golan Heights, where there is a population of Griffon Vultures, and over to the Hula Valley, where we hope to catch the last of a lingering population of wintering cranes. We will, in a day, cover about two-thirds of the country and a remarkable variety of habitats.

We agree to meet at 7:00 A.M., just outside the Jerusalem Bird Observatory. The observatory is on a one-acre plot of ground tucked between the Knesset and the Supreme Court. I am early and spend my time watching Yellow-vented Bulbuls in the trees outside the Knesset grounds until two armed guards drive over and ask if I am taking pictures. I hold up my binoculars and explain that I am looking at birds. Finding either my answer or my Hebrew amusing, they grin and drive away.

A little later, Leshem arrives. A tall, stooped, open-faced man of about fifty, he has an easy smile that is half a squint, as if he's looked up so long he expects to see the sun. I'm intrigued to discover, on top of his wild but wispy hair, a small knitted *kippa.* He is an observant Jew, contradicting my preconceived prejudice that the orthodox don't bird-watch. (I'm half right—he was raised in a secular family of Holocaust survivors and didn't

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become observant until the age of eleven.) He likes to quote biblical or rabbinic passages associated with the bird he is discussing—it is from Leshem that I learn about the Jewish identification of owls with Lilith.

I had visited the Jerusalem Bird Observatory the year before, in the optimistic aftermath of Ehud Barak's election, and the same soldier who was on duty then is there now, though this time he is carrying a weapon. This is the last of his three years of military service. It's not a bad posting for a bird-watcher—when we met in 2000 his biggest complaint was rambunctious Israeli schoolchildren trying to grab live birds out of his hands.

In addition to the binoculars around his neck and the rifle over his shoulder, Eran has a small canvas pouch in his hands, tied with a drawstring. He sits down at a table, weighs the pouch on an ounce scale, and extracts from it a small gray bird, a Chiffchaff, which he holds, wings flattened, in one large hand. The bird is tremulously still as Eran measures one wing with a finely calibrated ruler. He blows on the soft tufted breast feathers to gauge the amount of fat on the bird and, having recorded his findings in a book, clips a band around the bird's ankle with a small pair of pliers and tosses the Chiffchaff casually behind him into the air.

The trees are full of tiny gray birds with beautiful names—Orphean Warbler, Graceful Warbler, Willow Warbler. A blackbird is singing in a tree still hung with last year's pomegranates, which have the dull maroon coloring of clotted blood—dry and light, they stir in the air like Christmas ornaments. Palestine Sunbirds, tiny iridescent blue-green birds with sickle-shaped bills, whiz by with the sugar-high energy of hummingbirds.

Meanwhile, Gidon Perlman, a genial and intense medical student who helped found the center, has retrieved another Chiffchaff from the mist nets and fans out its wing like a deck of tiny cards so that he can show me how to distinguish it from the nearly identical Willow Warbler. The Chiffchaff, he explains, has an emargenation—a tiny notch—on the outer web of the sixth primary, whereas the Willow Warbler has an emargenation on the fifth primary. This is more ornithological detail than I usually deal with, and I am distracted by the low, mellow, slightly insane chant of a Hoopoe.

The Hoopoe is my favorite bird. This is not merely because of its comic beauty—the punky crest tipped in black, the pinkish cinnamon face and shoulders, the long decurved bill blackened as if it had been dipped in ink. The Hoopoe is a mythic bird and I always feel uplifted by it for extra-avian reasons.

My twelfth-century bestiary describes the Hoopoe (which is European as well as Mediterranean) as a bird that cares for its parents in their old age: it "preens their feathers for them, keeps them warm and licks their eyes. Thus the parents feel restored." According to Jewish legend, King Solomon needed to find a Hoopoe in order to construct the Temple.

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Finding the bird was a challenge even for Solomon, and as a result I'd imagined the bird was secretive and mysterious. I was shocked, therefore, the first time I saw one. It happened in the same Jerusalem Bird Observatory where I am getting my lesson on Chiffchaff emargenation. Eran, who was on duty then, too, was pointing out warblers for me when he suddenly turned and said, "There goes a Hoopoe." A bird the size of a crow, with big rounded wings like a black and white moth, swooped down and vanished into a hole in a concrete wall. "Filthy bird," Eran added with disgust. "They smell like shit."

So much for my quest for the magical bird, which I'd imagined pursuing all over the country. And so much for the divine bird of Jewish legend. Indeed, the bestiary has a second entry for the Hoopoe—this, T. H. White explains, often happens in medieval bestiaries—in which we are told that "the bird lines its nest with human dung. The filthy creature feeds on stinking excrement. He lives on this in graves."

The two-sided nature of the bird makes me like it even more. Indeed, Yossi Leshem tells me that the rabbis of the Talmud noticed that the Hoopoe flattens its crest out in flight, which, since the flattened crest looks like a beak pointing in the opposite direction, gives the bird the appearance of facing forwards and backwards. It is a sort of avian Janus, the two-faced god. This dual nature—the creature that builds the Temple and cares for its parents; the bird that reeks of humanity—makes it a particularly good emblem for birding in Israel. Why not make this bird of paradox the mascot of the Latrun birding center, with its war museum and its dreams of utopian unity? Doesn't Hoopoe (or at least the Latin name *Upupa epops*) sound like Utopia? Doesn't "Hoopoe" look like a strange spelling of "hope"?

But there is a darker current to the legend of Solomon building the Temple. He needed to find the Hoopoe in order to find a little worm that the Hoopoe guarded day and night. The worm had the remarkable power of eating through stone—finding him was necessary because God had forbidden Solomon to use metal, since metal could be turned into weapons and nothing linked to war could contaminate the Temple. To find the worm Solomon had to find the bird, but in order to find the bird he had to find the King of the Demons, Asmodeus, who knew the Hoopoe's whereabouts. Though Solomon successfully ensnared Asmodeus and built the Temple, the demon-king outwitted him and, for a time, took Solomon's place on the throne. The idea that you might lose yourself in the act of doing something holy, the fact that in order to make God's Temple it was necessary to travel to hell and consult demons, has haunted me for a long time.

The hole in the concrete wall is still there, and the bird has begun making its nest. I peer into the opening with a flashlight borrowed from Eran and even give a surreptitious sniff; but it's early in the nesting, and I

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get no sign of the bird, either visual or olfactory. Meanwhile Yossi Leshem has been pacing restlessly. We have the entire country to canvass for birds, and I am looking into the dark hole of a common bird that I have seen before.

Soon we are driving through the Judaean desert and up the Rift Road, which mirrors the migratory route of the birds. The mountains of Moab, which are in Jordan, are off to our right; to our left are the Judaean Mountains. The heat that rises from the earth and bounces off these mountain walls creates the thermal highway that soaring birds ride, expending a minimum of their own energy.

We are in the West Bank now, and there have been a number of shootings on the road, though I find Leshem's driving as frightening as the specter of attack. He is a frenetic talker and is whirling with bird-related schemes. He's helped create a festival of the cranes at a holistic spa near the Hula Valley. He's gotten a local winery to bottle "Lesser Kestrel wine" with a picture of the endangered raptor on the label. Lufthansa, which has a crane as its logo, is supporting his Web site for tracking migrating birds. He's been trying to interest the Palestinian Authority in a joint ecotourism venture (which, needless to say, has stalled). Meanwhile, he is still raising money for the birding center at Latrun—the auditorium is not yet completed, do I know any donors?

All the while, Leshem is interrupting himself to answer his constantly ringing cell phone, placing calls of his own to arrange my birding trip to Eilat, and scrunching down behind the steering wheel whenever we pass a police car, since in Israel it is illegal to talk on the phone while you're driving. Leshem not only manages to do both, he is able to turn away from the road so that he can rummage in the backseat for a picture of himself and the Palestinian Minister of the Environment releasing a banded bird together in 1998, find a video about bird strikes and the Israeli Air Force (an area Leshem has pioneered), or snag me a bottle of Lesser Kestrel wine that is rolling free on the floor behind us. Occasionally he slams on the brakes so we can get out to see a Barbary Falcon or Honey Buzzard migrating overhead. I am more afraid of going through the windshield than I am of being hit by a rock or a bullet. Still, I am glad that he skirts Jericho, where there has been a spate of attacks on cars with Israeli license plates.

The landscape is emblematic—everywhere I look I feel the genomic imprint of the whole region. Just outside Jericho, said to be the world's first city, we pass a Greek Orthodox monastery built on the Hill of Temptation, where Jesus is believed to have spent his time in the desert. At the foot of the Hill of Temptation is the giant, abandoned casino that was supposed to be a cornerstone of the new economy for Palestinians. It took in two or three million dollars a day before the latest violence brought Israeli tourism to a halt. The building has not merely been

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abandoned; shelled during the fighting, it is pocked with craters. And somewhere here along the highway, Leshem tells me, is the nesting ground of twenty-five Lesser Kestrels.

Our first stop is at Kfar Rupin, a kibbutz in the Jordan Valley that, because of its fishponds, attracts splendid waterfowl. A few years ago the kibbutz decided to put some money into guided bird tours. There are, of course, no tourists at present. It happens that I was a volunteer for a summer at Kfar Rupin eighteen years ago, when I was a sophomore in college. The kibbutz was then selling sod, and I woke up at 4:00 A.M. to work in the grass fields. I still remember being in the fields at dawn—the date palms along the horizon like feather dusters in the pink light; the squares of sod that rolled up into my hands along the conveyor-belt ramp built into the tractor. The grass was cool, but when you dug your fingers in, the clinging dirt was warm, like the pelt of an animal, as if the earth had been skinned.

I had no idea at the time how irrelevant kibbutz life had become to Israeli society, but I might have guessed, since most of the other volunteers were drifting European kids, stopping off in Israel to catch up on sleep and nutrition on their way back from Thailand. I used to rumble out to the fields each morning in the back of a truck with a tattooed skinhead and a punk rocker, who looked like a skinhead because the kibbutz had forced him to shave his green Mohawk. The only other Jewish volunteer was a dark-haired young woman from France that I was too shy to talk to. She wore her name in Hebrew around her neck and had, by the end of the summer, given syphilis to a volunteer from Ireland.

That summer I had no interest in birds. I spent a lot of time staring at the Gilboa Mountains, where my biblical namesake fell in battle fighting the Philistines alongside his father, the deposed King Saul. This time, however, I am delighted to see rare Pygmy Cormorants, all three of Israel's beautiful kingfishers, and a flock of Black Storks—only 30,000 pass through the country each year, compared with some 500,000 White Storks. The White Storks are there in abundance, too, gliding endlessly overhead. "Yea, the stork in the heavens knoweth her appointed times," says Jeremiah. There is something deeply soothing in the ancient patterns whirling above so much chaos.

From the Jordan Valley we drive to the Golan Heights, where I see Griffon Vultures flying over the ruins of Gamla, a Jewish city in the time of Joshua and, in the year 66, the site of an ill-fated revolt against the Romans. From there we drive to the Hula Valley and the shrunken remains of the once great Hula Lake and the swamp that surrounded it. If there is an environmental symbol of the way the founding myths of early Zionism have been turned on their head, it is the Hula Lake, which was drained in 1953. It was the most ambitious public works project to date in

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Israel; it was also an astonishing act of habitat destruction that led to the extinction of plant and animal species found nowhere else. As the Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai wrote:

> When I was young, I believed with all my heart
> the Huleh swamp had to be drained.
> Then all the bright-colored birds fled for their lives.
> Now half a century later they are filling it with water again
> because it was all a mistake.
> Perhaps my entire life I've been living a mistake.

When the Hula swamp was drained, it galvanized a nascent environmental movement that morphed into the Society for the Protection of Nature. In recent years, the Society has led efforts to re-flood a few areas around the lake in the hope of drawing back the millions of migrating birds that used to refuel in the Hula.

Preservation of the remnant scrap of swamp, and a more recent program to plant peanuts and corn in neighboring fields, have coaxed back five thousand cranes that now winter in the area. It is to see these birds, along with the flocks of Black Kites that gather at dusk, that Leshem and I have come here. The cranes are not where they usually are, and as we chase them by car from field to field I think about my aunt, long dead, who founded a kibbutz just a few miles away on the banks of the Jordan River. It is hard to suppress a certain melancholy that the country has turned out so different from the dreams of those early Zionists, and that kibbutz life itself, so utopian in its origins, is passing away. I tell myself that the present reality is not a negation of those early dreams, merely a sign that one phase has passed away and another has taken its place. But it is a painful feeling.

At last we find our cranes, not on the ground but in the air, where they are reeling off into the darkening sky, long necks stretched out in flight, black-fingered wings gripping the air, legs hanging straight out behind in a posture of crucifixion. There are hundreds of giant birds, a magnificent sight, but after flying all night and getting up at 5:00, and then spending twelve hours driving and birding, I am barely conscious enough to care. I fall asleep to the sound of Leshem talking about the radio transmitters they've been strapping to the backs of cranes to figure out where they go, and I wake several hours later outside my hotel in Tel Aviv.

"If I could have eliminated the Arabs and the Zionists, I could have created a paradise for birds," Amotz Zahavi tells me. A retired professor of zoology, Zahavi was one of the men who, nearly half a century ago, created the Society for the Protection of Nature. At the time, he was a young biology teacher and, realizing that the Hula swamp was going to

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be "reclaimed," he spent most of 1950 exploring the place by canoe. The malaria that had plagued my aunt was no longer a fear; a few years earlier, someone had hit on the idea of smearing the walls of houses with DDT to kill the mosquitoes that moved inside for the winter. In those days, Zahavi tells me, nobody knew its ill effects, and people often shampooed with DDT to kill lice.

I am surprised that he would still use the Zionist word "reclaim" for a project that destroyed so much irreplaceable habitat. Almost as soon as the country was born, conservationists understood that developing the land and filling it with people, draining the swamps, watering the desert—in short, a great many Zionist goals—bore unintended seeds of environmental destruction. Zahavi shrugs when I ask about this. He has the weary tone of someone familiar with the ironies of human history. "Since I believe the Jewish State is necessary for the survival of the Jews, the compromise was necessary."

Zahavi has spent the last thirty years living in the western Negev observing Arabian Babblers. He has a large gray-haired head, a kindly manner, and a sardonic style of talking. Though I meet him in his office at Tel Aviv University, Zahavi is still dressed for the desert in shapeless gray pants and a gray and rust flannel shirt. He believes the desert is the only real wilderness that can be saved in Israel; it is too late for the rest of the country. And he seems to believe that Babblers—long-tailed gray birds that live communally and perform elaborate rituals, such as an intricate "dance" conducted at dawn, in which the birds expose themselves to predators but grow closer as a group—hold the key to much animal and even human behavior. Oxford University Press recently published his remarkable book, *The Handicap Principle* (written with his wife and fellow researcher, Avishag), which is a kind of key to all animal behavior and argues, in part, that animals often handicap themselves as a perverse way of exhibiting strength.

Zahavi is one of the few people I meet during this trip who are willing to discuss the political situation in Israel, though he does it, appropriately, in the form of an animal parable. He tells me this parable while giving me a tour of the zoo at Tel Aviv University. The zoo was formerly the private collection of Heinrich Mendelsohn, the father of Israeli ornithology. Mendelsohn, who was born in Germany, once told Zahavi that he had learned his love of nature from a gymnasium teacher who later became a Nazi. "It's possible to love birds and hate Jews," Zahavi notes, dryly. We peer into cages containing indigenous animals such as the Sinai Fox and the Feral Cat, amid the yapping of wolves and the cry of eagles.

"I will tell you a story," Zahavi says, turning to face me in front of some fenced-in White Pelicans. "A smart frog and a stupid frog fall into a bowl of cream. The walls of the bowl are too smooth and too steep to climb. The cream is too thick to swim in and too thin to jump out of. The smart

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frog immediately realizes all this and drowns. The stupid frog, however, does not realize he is doomed and as a result he begins to kick his legs and thrash wildly about. Soon he has churned the cream into a lump of butter; he finds his footing and jumps to safety."

The moral of the story? "I have to become a stupid frog," Zahavi says with a wry smile.

Living on land claimed by another people may require being both a smart frog and a stupid one at the same time, though it is hard to imagine combining the canny realism necessary for survival and the hopeful groping that may lead to a settlement. It stretches the imagination to impossible limits and makes me think of the Hoopoe, the two-faced bird, the bird that cares for aged parents but lives in excrement, the bird that appears to be flying forward and backward simultaneously.

The real duality of the Hoopoe is that it is both a mythic bird and an actual bird, living in Temple legend while casually making its nest in a concrete wall next to the Knesset. Seeing the real bird alongside the imaginary bird is one of the challenges of birding. One has been named and tagged and studied and dreamed about; the other simply is, without explanation.

The rare Hume's Tawny Owl that I wait for in darkness in Eilat on my last birding day also has its burden of lore and human association. It is a ghost bird and a seductive spirit. It is a disbelieving Jew and an incarnation of wisdom. It is a million things in myth and in legend and in science. But when it finally arrives, it is just an owl—a bird feathered even on its toes so that it makes no sound as it flies. And when it suddenly begins hooting into the night, the sound is inhuman, chilling, like a stylus torn across the surface of a record. It sings straight into my bones.

We snap on our searchlight, and the bird is just where we hoped it would land. I expect it to look enormous, but it is tiny on its high perch, nearly indistinguishable from the pale rock. In the scope its orange eyes and white belly feathers catch the glare. We have tricked it into coming by playing a recording of its own voice, but its arrival still feels like an unexpected blessing. It is a real owl, even it if has come to drive away an imaginary rival. We take turns watching it through the scope. Then, out of respect, we turn off our light and listen in darkness.

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Winter Wheat

PAUL MULDOON

I

The plowboy was something his something as I nibbled the lobe
of her right ear and something her blouse
for the Empire-blotchy globe
of her left breast on which there something a something louse.

II

Those something lice like something seed-pearls
and her collar something with dandruff
as when Queen Elizabeth entertained the Earls
in her something something ruff.

III

I might have something the something groan
of the something plowboy who would with such something urge
the something horses, a something and a roan,
had it not been for the something splurge
of something like the hare
which even now managed to something itself
    from the something plowshare.

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Getting to Roger

WILLIAM LOIZEAUX

For a couple of months in that splendid late summer of 1998, we all remembered the name of Roger Maris, as Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa shattered his 1961 record of 61 home runs. The next year, however, when McGwire and Sosa surpassed the old record again, there was scant mention of the New York Yankee outfielder who had set it. Baseball, the media—we had all moved on. The former benchmark was no longer *the* benchmark. Then, last spring, the HBO movie *61** re-created Maris's difficult record-breaking season, and his name was in the papers again, this time in the Arts & Entertainment pages. There was a flurry of ads, reviews, and photos of a Roger look-alike swinging for the fences. But that too has passed, and as another season moves toward the play-offs and World Series, and as yet another slugger, Barry Bonds, has already topped the old mark, Roger, like those ancient, desultory games of April, is all but forgotten. Again.

In December 1998, still savoring the sensational season that had recently ended, I was studying a map of Minnesota while spending the holidays in St. Paul. A sort of elongated mushroom, Minnesota is roughly bisected by Route I-94. From the Twin Cities in the southeast, the highway cuts northwest, skirting St. Cloud, then goes on to Fargo, North Dakota—Roger's home, the place where he is buried, and where I had heard that there was a Roger Maris Museum. I decided to make the trip.

I had never been a big Maris fan. Like every kid in New Jersey and what seemed like the rest of the world, in the 1960s I lived and breathed Mickey Mantle—his Herculean swings, his majestic going-going-GONE!

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home runs, his crushing strikeouts, his speed, his easy smile, his jauntily cocked cap. And, oh, the injuries: the broken foot; the torn, thinning cartilage in both knees; the pain he "played through." Mick was The Man. For several Halloweens in a row, I raked in candy around my subdivision while wearing an old pajama top with a huge number 7 Magic Markered on the back. By the mid-1960s, when Mick was playing virtually crippled, I learned to tape my healthy legs with Ace bandages and bravely limp and grimace. His triumph and tragedy were mine.

Roger Maris never inspired such awe or empathy. He was the grim, sullen one with cold, wary eyes and a chip on his shoulder, his jaw set, his sleeves too short, and his hair a flattop, sharp as a bed of tacks. He looked like a hard-ass, possibly a hood. He probably wouldn't give you the time of day. His home runs, like BBs, flew into Yankee Stadium's short right field porch, gone before you even saw them, with none of the arc and grandeur of Mick's. They were "cheap shots," my friends and I agreed. Roger couldn't hit for average. His record was a freak. Besides, if doctors hadn't chained Mantle to a hospital bed for the last week of that 1961 season, he surely would have dragged himself to the plate and smashed more homers than Maris. And then there was the long anticlimax, the ignoble remains of Roger's career: the leg pulls, the hand injury that he couldn't "play through," and finally his two end-of-the-road seasons, in '67 and '68, with the loathsome St. Louis Cardinals, the very team that in 1964 had ended all our Yankee glory and brought on the Dark Ages. No Jersey kid in his right mind would wear that number 9.

Yet now I think more about Roger than I do about The Mick. His death from lymphoma in December 1985 was a surprising blow. And it wasn't just because he was the first of my childhood Yankees to go, or that he had gone at the age of fifty-one, which increasingly strikes me as very young. Mick, whether discouraged, exuberant, or dissipated, was always a guy you thought you knew. With Roger, the blinds were shut tight. He studied the ground as he circled the bases. After he hit his historic sixty-first home run, his teammates had to push him up the dugout steps to acknowledge the cheers of the crowd. By 1962, he was speaking to the media as briefly as possible. He seemed willfully to fade from view, disregarding our cheers and taunts, leaving us dangling and confused. And at the end of 1966, after two injury-prone and lackluster seasons, he did in fact disappear—traded out west to that other league for a journeyman infielder named Charlie Smith, who hadn't even made it with the Mets.

Central Minnesota, between St. Paul and Fargo, was smoothed by a succession of Ice Age glaciers, which left gentle, rolling plains of fertile soil. Today it is covered by vast farms and small towns, usually with miles between them. Stalky rows of corn and wheat, visible in the winter through a few inches of snow, follow the contours of the land. Occasion-

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ally a blinking radio tower needles up, pitiful in all that sky. As you drive northwest on I-94, past Alexandria and Fergus Falls, an immense, white distance surrounds you. You have no thoughts of New Jersey—to say nothing of the Bronx. Amazingly, this distance seems to widen as you approach Moorhead, the westernmost city in Minnesota, and enter the Red River Valley. It isn't really a valley, but the flat and loamy floor of the former Lake Agassiz, which covered this area in the Ice Age. To call it flat is not enough. Interrupted only by the stubbled crops, the rows straight and endless, the land looks more like that ancient, frozen lake. The Red River itself, as you leave Minnesota, is not visible beyond the bridge guardrails. But here and there little ranch houses soon appear, with frosted windows and smoke streaming from chimneys. When at noon I crossed into Fargo, it was minus three degrees Fahrenheit (minus thirty-five with the windchill factor), and veils of snow were sweeping across the road.

In 1871 the Northern Pacific Railroad reached Fargo, and since then it has become the distribution center for a huge agricultural region, a market for wheat, oats, barley, corn, sugar beets, potatoes, cattle, and hogs. At about seventy-five thousand souls—just twenty thousand more than would fill Yankee Stadium—Fargo is the most populous city in North Dakota, with the state university, the Hector International Airport, the Fargodome, and, on the western outskirts, a replica pioneer village called Bonanzaville, USA, where tourists can stoop into sod houses. A mile south of Bonanzaville sprawls the West Acres Shopping Center, with a Sears, a Walgreens, and a Penney's. It is like every other mall in America, an unlikely destination for anyone but shoppers and bored teenagers, except that here is the Roger Maris Museum.

Before visiting the museum I had lunch at The Granary, a mall restaurant done up with a hayloft and weathered boards to resemble a barn. I had a beer with my meal, because beer was important to Roger. His paternal grandfather had come from Austria to settle in Hibbing, Minnesota, in the Iron Range northwest of Duluth; there he opened a tavern and served lager to thirsty miners. Not far from that tavern, Roger Eugene Maras was born in 1934. His father held a low-wage job with the Northern Pacific, and five years later Roger would move with his parents and brother to Grand Forks, North Dakota, another railway town, and five years after that to Fargo. He would later change a letter in his last name, and during his playing career he would move his own family to a Kansas City suburb, and subsequently to Gainesville, Florida. But whatever he did, wherever he went, two things remained constant: that bristling flattop and the beer. After a Yankee game, Roger would have a couple of Ballantines and a cigarette whose brand he was paid to endorse. As a Cardinal he would play for Gussie Busch, the beer baron owner, who set him up with an Anheuser-Busch distributorship when he retired in 1968. Like his grandfather, Roger sold beer until the day he

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died. In a sense he continued selling it. Until 1997, if you lived in central Florida and ordered a couple of cases or kegs, you'd get them by way of the Maris Distributing Corporation, run by Roger's brother, Rudy.

The Roger Maris Museum is off the main mall corridor, near the entrance of the Sears and opposite the John Deere tractor outlet. It is not a museum in the usual sense. You don't pay to enter, or pass through a turnstile. You don't go from room to room, and you can't become a member. It's just there, unattended, along the tan brick wall between Spencer Gifts and the A-1 Pet Center: a ten-foot-high, seventy-two-foot-long glass-fronted display case, not unlike an extra-large trophy case that might stand outside the locker rooms in any regional high school.

Jim McLaughlin and Bob Smith, two Legionnaires from Fargo Post No. 2, hatched the idea at a breakfast meeting during the 1983 American Legion World Series in Fargo, to which Roger and his friend and fellow flattopped Yankee, first baseman Bill "Moose" Skowron, had been invited. According to Jim, Roger said he had some old photos and trophies in his rec room in Gainesville, but didn't want to make a public display of them. But Moose Skowron urged him to, and the following fall, when Roger learned he had cancer, he agreed to help plan the museum with the local Legionnaires. Driving a U-Haul, Jim and Bob brought back to Fargo a hundred and sixty items from Roger's rec room, and on June 23, 1984, with Roger, Moose, and all of Post No. 2 crammed into the corridor, the mayor of Fargo made a short speech, and the lights in the display case came on.

Today the museum is still stunning in its modesty and in what I can only call its loving attention to detail—to every dustless, shining trophy and plaque, every wood-framed photo, every neatly labeled historic bat and ball, every wrinkle-free uniform worn by a headless bust or life-size plastic model. Stunning, too, is its uncomplicated vision of Roger's life. Here you will not find references to his struggles with the New York press; his bitter silences; his reputation as "Red-assed Roger," the angry, callous, or indifferent young man who turned his back on certain old-timers and reporters, and who, after failing to run out a routine grounder in a nationally televised game in 1963, flashed his middle finger at jeering fans in Minneapolis, some of whom had driven 250 miles from Fargo to attend.

The museum presents a kinder, gentler Roger, one I had seldom heard of: the hometown kid who married his high school sweetheart and never forgot his humble Midwestern roots. Here, interspersed with baseball memorabilia, hang photographs of his winsome family, of Roger as a middle-aged man in a gray suit shaking hands with children in a local hospital. As curator Jim McLaughlin's Web site describes it, the museum is "a permanent shrine to a reluctant hero," a shrine that "allows visitors

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to relive Roger's legendary life every minute the mall is open."

There is so much here—and much of it from so long before Roger came to the Yankees and entered our lives. Medals, rings, watches, pennants. Roger's nappy varsity letters from Bishop Shanley High, where as a football star he once ran back four kickoffs for touchdowns, still a national record. There are stats and stats. Photos and photos. At a local service station, as a teenager pumping gas on weekends. Or talking earnestly with Sister Bertha, a portly nun who was one of his teachers. In another photo he stands alone in the outfield against a vast sky—a Class C rookie in the baggy uniform of the Fargo-Moorhead Twins, with hairless forearms and a puny glove half the size of the ones today. Then he's in team pictures with the Class B Iowa Kernels, the AA Reading Indians, the AAA Indianapolis Indians, and finally, in 1957–58, with the big-league tribe itself. Next come photos with the Athletics, in Kansas City, where, according to Maris's 1962 autobiography (*Roger Maris at Bat,* with Jim Ogle), he was most comfortable during his early baseball years—in another Midwest river town, where press and fans were easygoing, and where he could live privately with his growing family (he had two kids by then). In the photos and baseball cards from this period, he doesn't seem particularly happy. He wears his usual serious, impenetrable look, his face like a chiseled stone. Yet the skin beneath his eyes is light and smooth, and he still has a youthful, promising, essentially untroubled look that he would lose once he came to New York.

State Historical Society of North Dakota 1036-1 Roger Maris.

But to New York he did come, twenty-five years old, unwillingly traded in 1960, leaving behind his kids and his wife, who was pregnant again. And it was during that year, and especially during the next two, that staggering success, competitive pressure, and the glare of media scrutiny made him feel freakish and increasingly irritable. Reporters would pry for controversy and juicy personal tidbits; Roger, devoid of wit or guile, would say in his slow, monotonous voice that no, he wasn't feuding with Mantle, and no, he didn't "play around" on the road, and yes—for the hundredth time—it was a hanging curve ball that he had hit. "There were

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many times during the [1961] season," his autobiography records, "when I did feel I was ready to crack up." His hair began falling out. He broke out in rashes. To avoid the public, he hid in hotel rooms. By turns, he grudgingly cooperated with, tried to ignore, griped to, and was overly honest with reporters, who then printed every awkward, embarrassing word. All this is much chronicled, but is barely in evidence at the museum, unless you get close to the photos and look at Roger's eyes, at their pouched and haunting darkness.

However ill at ease he was in those first New York years, they brought him a cascade of trophies and other symbols of achievement that have since come to rest in the museum. Plaques remind us that Roger was the American League's Most Valuable Player for 1960 and 1961. And there he is, the most unlikely of cultural icons, belting a round-tripper on the front of a Wheaties box. Other artifacts make your eyes pop. Impaled on the pedestal of the 1960 Gold Glove Award is a life-size Rawlings glove, wide open as if to snare a line drive, apparently fashioned of pure gold (though I suspect it is spray-painted leather). A few feet away, coiled like a cobra, lies the massive Hickok Belt awarded to the best professional athlete of 1961. The belt resembles a piece of professional wrestling gear. Its golden buckle measures four inches wide; its weight would almost topple a man. The crowning trophy, however, is in fact a crown: the 1961 Sultan of Swat Award. Tall and golden, it might indeed be suited to a sultan, except that it seems larger than any human head. Its band is decorated with crossed bats and surmounted by five baseball diamonds, each with a jewel set into its pitcher's mound. In a photo of Roger accepting the crown, he's hefting it with both hands above his flattop. He looks a little dazed and dubious, not sure if he should try the thing on.

More tellingly than the trophies, the displays of statistics and photos of Roger in action remind us of who and what he was during this period. Not flashy, not graceful. Not what you would call intuitive, inspired, or inspiring. Just a grooved, precise, and methodical wonder that for a time simply kept going and going. Never mind his overall batting averages. Look at his stats with men in scoring position (.400-plus for three years running!). Or look at his slugging averages (.581 in 1960, .620 in 1961), or at his lifetime fielding percentage (.982, better than Babe Ruth's, Joe DiMaggio's, or Henry Aaron's—and exactly the same as Mantle's).

Better yet, study the photo sequence of Roger's swing. Notice how compact, controlled, and level it is. No Reggie Jackson windmill theatrics. No vicious Mark McGwire uppercuts or cute Sammy Sosa hops, skips, or jumps. This is a pure thing of geometrical beauty. At the instant when Roger's bat meets the ball, his hips have opened; his front (right) leg is fully extended and is in perfect line with his back-slanting torso. Then, from his shoulders, his arms also make a line, straight out, horizontal as a prairie, a line that continues through the bat to the ball. All of Roger

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went to that point of impact. Nothing in his swing was extra. It was what my father, an unassuming man not given to flourishes or overexertion himself, always called a "quick, sweet swing."

Now look closely at Roger's ropy, flowing arm muscles. How odd they seem: thick, but somehow underdeveloped. How unlike the sleeve-splitting, bulbous, iron-pumped and hormone-enhanced grotesqueries of today's sluggers. These muscles came honestly with the work of hitting, and with the beer and crabs that came afterward. "I was trying to do my job," Roger's book reminds us time and again. Why encumber yourself with more than you need to do a job well?

Then look at the photos of Roger at the pinnacle of success, circling the bases after his sixty-first home run. His head is down. There is no outward exultation, no upraised arms, no leaps or fists pumping the air. As he did after every other homer he hit as a Yankee, Roger shakes hands at third base with coach Frank Crosetti, and at the plate with the next man in the order, who on this day is Yogi Berra. There are no game-stopping celebrations, no on-field hugs from the kids, no photo-op smooching, say, with Mrs. Babe Ruth. Such events didn't happen in 1960s baseball, and they would have been unimaginable for Roger. Straight toward the dugout he moves, alone, inscrutable still, perhaps with a hint of relief, like a man turning into his driveway after a long day at the office.

He was happy, of course. "As happy," he would write, "as it is possible for any person to be." When his teammates pushed him up the dugout steps, only briefly—and sheepishly, it appears in the photos—did he wave his cap to the crowd. For Roger happiness was a private emotion to be shared with a small circle of family and friends, and pride was more private still. All the attention, his book tells us, was "embarrassing." It made him out to be more or less than he was, and he thought it showed up his teammates. Was this false modesty? I think not. In part, it must have come with the territory, with living in a place as cold, flat, and wide as Fargo, where on a winter's day the sky is so big that it seems to merge with the gray-white land. Here you can't do anything—can't even hurry across a windy parking lot—without realizing how small you are. How can you not sense that anything you accomplish will be swept away in time?

Slowly at first, Roger's productivity on the field diminished, and precipitously his relations with the press degenerated. He was quoted in the spring of 1962 as saying, "I'm through with being a nice guy." He turned down photo sessions with old-timers he didn't like, and at least once he failed to show for a press interview. In nationally syndicated columns, he was called an "ingrate," a "whiner," a man of "treacherous smallness." In *Sports Illustrated*, Robert Creamer wrote of "a petulant, self-pitying, constantly irritated man," and Roger grew quieter and more withdrawn. Still, in 1962 he hit 33 home runs, with 100 runs batted in, an

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outstanding year by almost any measure—unless you had hit 61, with 142 runs batted in, the year before.

Things got worse in 1963, the year of the upraised middle finger—one of the seemingly few parts of Roger's anatomy that remained fully operational. A back injury, muscle pulls, and a strained elbow limited him to 90 games and 23 home runs. And while he improved a bit in 1964, the year the Cardinals did us in, the bottom fell out in 1965, when Roger broke his hand and the Yankee management acknowledged the injury only belatedly. That season he hit just eight home runs, and was routinely booed at home and away as the club compiled its first losing record in forty years. Then, in 1966, the unthinkable happened. The Yankees finished dead last. In teenage despair, I lost interest in the team—and so, it appears, did Roger. In September he had a talk with manager Ralph Houk. According to Houk, Roger said he was quitting: "He was sick of the booing, sick of playing in New York, and he was going home for good."

Except for the bats he used in the '63 and '64 World Series, there is little in the museum from this period of decline. In December 1966, the Yankees quietly traded Roger to the Cardinals, back to yet another Midwest river town, where less was expected of him and he could spend more time with his family—he now had six kids. In St. Louis he was apparently quite happy, out of the spotlight, a steady, no-more-than-average player who helped get his team to the World Series each of the two years he was there.

By then I was in high school, way too cool to dress up as a Yankee on Halloween, and baseball wasn't much on my mind. Still, I remember one October evening in 1968 when, in the midst of my homework, I went into our kitchen. My father, in his plaid shirt and rumpled corduroys, was watching TV. The Series was on, and at that moment Roger came to bat. What I saw that evening stunned me, and I can see it to this day. Just a year before Woodstock, Roger still had his flattop, but he didn't look the same. He had a paunch. He moved as if his feet hurt, and he didn't swing as hard as he once had. He struck me as incalculably old, like certain men of what is now my age who hang out in hardware stores. He also seemed to be wearing a costume, which turned out to be a Cardinal uniform with those terrible birds perched on a bat across his chest. He still wore the same number he had as a Yankee, and that was the most disconcerting thing. In an arch above the big 9 on his back, it said, incredibly, MARIS.

A life-size plastic model wears that Cardinal uniform now, and you'll see it as you near the Spencer Gifts end of the museum. Beyond that hang photos of Roger after his playing days: as a beer businessman in his Gainesville office or teeing off with his golfing friends. By all accounts, he enjoyed his new life, made a good living, spent time with his family, and did little to attract attention. It took the suasion of George Steinbrenner to get him back to Yankee Stadium in 1978 for a flag-raising ceremony and then for Old Timers' Day. In a photo with Whitey Ford, Mickey

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Mantle, and Joe DiMaggio, Roger stands on the field, taking in the applause, a middle-aged man squeezed into a young man's uniform. Between bouts of chemotherapy, he made his last return in 1984 for a ceremony to retire his number. On a day when only the best is remembered and the rest, for the moment, is put aside, he again seems relaxed and pleased. His face, however, appears pale and doughy, a look that, with a jolt, I recognize in my father, who lives with leukemia now. A year after this photo Roger would die, but in this instant he is very much alive. Neither the cancer nor the chemo has gotten to his flattop.

At the very end of the display case is an addendum: a TV monitor running a continuous loop of interviews with Roger, one from his Yankee days, others from later in his life. They are less than scintillating, and as I listened, I focused less on the meaning of Roger's words than on the way he said them. His voice was indeed soft, slow, and flat-toned, which to my ear seemed to imply a dull indifference to the question, to the interviewer, even to himself. At worst, it sounded like the grudging sullenness for which he was so notorious. "That Maris," an irked Casey Stengel, his manager in 1960, once said. "You'd tell him something, and he'd stare at you for a week without answering." No wonder Roger drove New York reporters nuts, especially if they were writing on deadline.

Yet as you listen to Roger's voice mingle with the voices of shoppers heading for Sears or of farmers admiring John Deere tractors, he begins to seem increasingly engaged—certainly not sullen. Here Roger is not an oddity. He speaks in what linguists call a Northern dialect (the one ridiculously exaggerated in the movie *Fargo*), in which patterns of pronunciation, stress, and intonation methodically flatten the language. Vowels are given narrower range, Rs never roll, and frequent pauses invite others to respond. To me, Roger sounded like everyone else at the mall, and I doubted that those busy shoppers were all sullen and disengaged. Despite the drone of their voices, they seemed quite animated.

"We . . . treasure our world-champion slow talkers," writes Kathleen Norris in her book *Dakota*, "people who speak as if God has given them only so many words to use in a lifetime, and having said them they will die." Plains speech doesn't waste words or show off. It seems to trust what comes with waiting. Roger could be stubborn, prickly, and uncommunicative, especially toward people he didn't know. But at times we may have misread him. Some of what we construed as his sour character, or his dull lack of character, may simply have been his Northern dialect.

It was getting on toward dusk, and the temperature had dropped to minus eleven, when I left West Acres and drove about a mile east to 1510 Thirteenth Avenue South, where Roger and his family once lived. In a neighborhood of almost identical structures on identical lots, the house was painfully neat and small: single-story, squat and square, with white

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trim and blue fiberboard shingles. It couldn't have been more than twenty-five feet wide. Its snow-covered roof was almost flat. The house barely seemed to emerge from the earth, a northern plains house, a variant of the sod house in which you hunker down against the sky. Through the front-door window I could make out a cramped living room with a Christmas tree and a couch. The short driveway was shoveled; fresh rock salt covered the concrete step, yet no inside lights were on, and no one answered the bell. When Roger lived here, this was the western edge of Fargo, just a few more blocks of houses—then nothing!—between here and places like Bismarck. I rang the bell again. I went around back to the tiny yard and called over the fence. But all was quiet, except for the wind, which tore at a sheet of plastic covering one of the windows. I gave up and returned to my frosted car, thinking how strange it might feel to find yourself in New York City when this had been your home.

Before starting back toward St. Paul, I made a detour north, out near the airport, where again the prairie opens wide. On a narrow dirt road, with the lights of the runways beyond a fence to my right, I turned into Holy Cross Cemetery. It was dark now, the snow a little deeper than in town, and for a few moments I drove slowly along, with my high beams sweeping the headstones. Then I saw it, beneath a small tree. I stopped and got out, taking a flashlight, and crunched across the snow.

I had never seen a grave quite like it. A long foundation supports a small, light-gray stone, which in turn upholds a glinting black diamond, a polished slab of granite about four feet high, standing on one end. The diamond, of course, is a baseball diamond, though it has no bases or batter's boxes. At its center, MARIS is incised in a rectangle the shape of a pitching rubber; in the bottom corner, near where home plate would be, Roger's etched figure blasts his historic sixty-first homer with that familiar geometric swing.

It's a good gravestone, as gravestones go. A lot like the person beneath it. All straight lines, sharp edges, and hard right angles. No fancy scrollwork or festooned flowers, no *Dearly Beloveds,* no scriptural passage that he might not have known. Not even a cross. Just his name, that image of what he did best, and along the lip of the foundation, the words AGAINST ALL ODDS. It's a stark, no-nonsense grave that might have been appreciated by Roger—a man who, when presented with a sterling silver dish at a banquet, stood to accept it and, according to the writer Robert Creamer, said, "Thank you for this platter." Then he took his seat.

One of the more overt messages of the Roger Maris Museum is that Roger deserves to be in the Baseball Hall of Fame. Beneath the TV monitor are stacks of pamphlets, some of which urge you to write to the Veterans Committee in Cooperstown. "Here's What You Can Do," begins one of these pamphlets, and you'll find sample letters arguing that Roger

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should be elected. I will not get into that argument here, and besides, it's too late. In March 2001, when the Veterans Committee last voted, Roger's name did not appear on the final old-timers' ballot. Barring a miracle, he won't make the Hall of Fame.

This saddens me, but not that much. Really, it's okay. Better he be enshrined here on the flat floor of Lake Agassiz than among the rolling moraines and fingering lakes of central New York State. His own land bespeaks him, and so do its people. In words as direct, befuddling, and true as those of Yogi Berra, Don Gooselaw, a lifelong friend, says of him: "Roger was just Roger all the time." Always a guy from Fargo.

So to get to Roger, you have to get here. And while Fargo may be more inconvenient for many than Cooperstown, the people who must get here do—or are here already. In a dented patch of snow on the foundation of the grave, right below the diamond and above the word ODDS, I found a baseball that night. Evidently it had been there a long time; it was frozen to the stone. At one point it must have been waterlogged with rain, then repeatedly frozen and thawed or sun-baked, for it was distended, like an avocado. This was written between the seams:

Your
accomplish
ment
will
NEVER
be
forgotten
And
Neither
Will
You.

I wish I could believe those brave words, but they're untrue—at least for most of us. Roger was a straightforward, unpretentious man, yet unlike our more lasting heroes, he was utterly without charisma or flash, a bore in our media age. He was no larger or more colorful than the general lot of us, except that for a couple of years he could really hit a baseball. Even at his zenith, he reminds us of the ordinariness of life and of what we usually are: not heroic, not altogether pretty or pleasant, but capable of a certain modest dignity that comes less from having achieved than from having persevered for a while. So he is receding once more from our collective memory, and soon he may recede from my own. Always a shadow, he is now eclipsed—though I have the sense that the last place he'll recede from will be this one.

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THE UNCERTAIN ART

The Great Books

SHERWIN B. NULAND

"Another damned, thick, square book! Always scribble, scribble, scribble! Eh, Mr. Gibbon?" So the Duke of Gloucester is said to have exclaimed in 1781, when Edward Gibbon presented him with a copy of the second volume of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire.* We have no record of the portly little scholar's response, but we may guess that he paid little heed to the nobleman's foolishness. The first volume of his chronicle had been so astonishingly successful that Gibbon must already have suspected that his "scribbles" might be destined for literary immortality.

Since the *Iliad* and the Bible, the course of our civilization has been marked by the appearance of great books, some of which have become recently designated as Great Books. For every one of these that competes for inclusion in the so-called Western Canon, there are dozens, of equal importance to the development of our culture, that are little read or are remembered only by specialists of one sort or another. Among them are some of the landmark works in the history of medical knowledge. More than the members of any other profession or calling—except perhaps the clergy—doctors have always recorded their experiences and interpretations. They have done this primarily for instructional and archival reasons, but a byproduct has been the influence of such works on the ways in which their readers think about humankind's relationship with nature. I've chosen four books, each representing a century, to illustrate the uses to which some of the greatest of medical scribblings have been put by their readers.

Today the vast majority of additions to medical knowledge are transmitted via professional journals and meetings, or even on-line. The reliance on periodicals began in the middle of the nineteenth century and grew rapidly thereafter. Thus, of any advance of the twentieth century, the contribution destined to have the most profound effect on diagnosis and therapy—the discovery of the structure of DNA—was communicated in a few pages of the British scientific weekly *Nature.* That journal—along with *Science, The New England Journal of Medicine, The Lancet,* and a few others—is one of the sources to which physicians customarily turn when they seek information about the latest findings, and even the clinical implications, of biomedical research. Books, on the other hand, are more apt to be compilations of material long since reported in journals, or explications of the theoretical or philosophical speculation that has always accompanied the healer's art. Since rapidity of dissemination and virtually immediate sharing have become crucial to the scientific enterprise, books are unlikely to reclaim their former importance. In some ways that is a pity. Much has been gained, but something has been lost. Gone are the literary and aesthetic qualities of the books that have marked the long road on which medicine traveled once it saw that its most fitting partner for the journey was science—not religion or superstition.

Medicine's intertwining with science began when physicians finally realized that universalizing, all-explaining theories about human biology served only to foster the misinterpretation of observed phenomena. Until then, a conflict between what was actually experienced and what the grand conceptual scheme told a physician he *should* be experiencing was always resolved in favor of the latter.

Among the most egregious examples of old-school thinking was the invention—for "invention" is precisely what it was—of a structure called the *rete mirabile* by the second-century

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medical mahatma Galen. In keeping with the inherited dogma of his predecessors, Galen taught that the vital pneuma, an inscrutable airy quality that was believed to bring the life and spirit of the universe into the body, is inhaled from the surrounding cosmos. In order for intellectual activity and movement to be regulated, Galen assured his centuries of unquestioning followers, the vital pneuma had to be converted into a formulation he called *psychic* pneuma before reaching the brain. Galen claimed to have found the structure in which this process took place: a coiled network of blood vessels at the base of the skulls of the dogs, monkeys, and pigs he dissected. Never having opened the body of a human being, Galen assumed that these vessels were to be found in all mammals.

To Galen's mind—guided by the all-encompassing notions of pneuma, spirit, and the humors, and by the entire edifice of inherited cosmic philosophy that had been erected to explain the workings of nature—the discovery of such structures as the *rete mirabile* was virtually a necessity. It filled a gap in his comprehension of the grand plan set in motion by a masterful demiurge or prime mover. In fact, there was not a shred of evidence for the existence of the *rete mirabile,* in animals or elsewhere. Since Galen was virtually alone in such anatomical explorations, the few criticisms of his findings were drowned in the chorus of approval that would establish Galenic domination over medical thought for a millennium and a half.

Thanks to a great book, Galen's seemingly indestructible temple of theory eventually crumbled into the dust of history. In August of 1543, a twenty-eight-year-old professor (yes, a twenty-eight-year-old professor!) of anatomy published a remarkable volume called *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (*On the Workings of the Human Body*), and the world of medicine changed forever. The volume's 663 folio pages, eleven large plates, and almost three hundred other illustrations were the product of the first systematic dissections of man ever published for the instruction of physicians. Eschewing the fanciful theories to which the physicians of his time were heir, Professor Andreas Vesalius of the University of Padua had meticulously dissected a series of cadavers and, influenced only by what he actually saw, had faithfully recorded his observations. He refused to be misled by errors of the past or by the grand scheme of the theoretical demiurge. In a triumphant proclamation of the new way of discovering biological reality, he urged his readers to rely only on "the book of the human body that cannot lie," exhorting them to "begin to put faith in their own not ineffectual sight and powers of reason rather than in the writings of Galen." Galen, he said, had been "deceived by his monkeys" and by his determination to marshal evidence to support the worldview he espoused. Not only was there no *rete mirabile* at the base of the brain, but some two hundred other anatomical formulations that Galen had put forward to conform with the all-embracing conceptual framework of ancient authority were also found to be erroneous.

Vesalius's was far more than a mere textbook of anatomy. Realizing that the book's publication would be one of the great turning points in the history of ideas, the young anatomist was resolved that every detail of production should be as painstaking and technically peerless as his dissections. The illustrations were drawn by Stephan van Calcar, a student of Titian's; to find the most skilled woodblock cutters of the time, the author traveled to Venice. When all was completed he packed the blocks and text on the backs of mules and followed them on the long, perilous journey over the Alps to Basel, where Joannes Operinus maintained one of the finest printing establishments in Europe. The Vesalian masterpiece was a great achievement not only in the history of anatomy, but also in the craft of bookmaking and in the art of pedagogy.

But the most important result of the *Fabrica*'s appearance was its underlying doctrine of reliance only on one's own experiences, unbiased by the influence of the past or by theoretical constructions based on philosophical concepts. It is by the small steps of interpreting individual observations that theories should be constructed, said Vesalius, and not the other way around; observations must not be deformed by forcing them to fit into grand schemes hatched by abstract thinkers in bygone days.

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That was the stance adopted in the following century by William Harvey. In 1628 he produced *Exercitatio Anatomica de Motu Cordis et Sanguinis in Animalibus* (*On the Motion of the Heart and Blood in Animals*), the great book that some have called the most important contribution ever made to the study of human biology. In accordance with received wisdom, Galen had taught—and physicians still believed—that blood reached the structures of the body by a process of ebb and flow through the veins, originating in the liver. Because the tissues used most of the blood that reached them, the flow had to be constantly replenished by the liver. Following the example of Vesalius, Harvey decided to see for himself. His conclusion, after a series of experiments and measurements (the first time, incidentally, that quantitative evidence had been used in the study of physiology), was "that the blood is driven into a round by a circular motion . . . and lastly, that the motion and pulsation of the heart is the only cause." Flying in the face of accepted dogma, Harvey had discovered the circulation of the blood, and its origin in the pumping action of the heart.

Unlike his predecessor's *Fabrica,* Harvey's *De Motu Cordis* is an unprepossessing little book. Its seventy-two quarto-sized pages measure five-and-a-half by seven-and-a-half inches, and are printed in pedestrian fashion. On a shelf of medical classics, the book is hardly noticeable. But its modest appearance and its brevity are of no account: it is a kind of Gettysburg Address of medical discovery. After Harvey's finding, the value of inductive reasoning—championed in another great book of the time, Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum*—became the standard of medical research and theory. Bacon's work was at the core of what has been called the Scientific Revolution of the extraordinarily productive seventeenth century. It fell to Harvey to encapsulate the entire process in his usual succinct manner by saying of Mother Nature, "[A]s long as we confer with our own eyes, and make our ascent from lesser things to higher, we shall at length be received into her closet-secrets." This was the philosophy of Vesalius, and it would be the philosophy of every important medical scientist who came after.

From the standpoint of clinical progress, the great book of the following century was one published by a man then nearing the end of a long life. In 1761, when he was seventy-nine, Giovanni Morgagni brought forth his monumental three-volume work, *De Sedibus et Causis Morborum per Anatomen Indagatis* (*Seats and Causes of Diseases Investigated by Anatomy*), and in a single stroke drove the last nail into the coffin of Galen's dying theories. Galen had taught that disease resulted from an imbalance of four theoretical humors. In reporting a series of seven hundred dissections, Morgagni demonstrated that people sicken not on account of fluxes of one or another humor, but because of anatomical changes within organs of the body. It was not the surfeit or deficiency of phlegm, or blood, or black or yellow bile that produced the symptoms associated with individual diseases, but abnormalities in the tissues themselves. In referring to symptoms as "the cries of the suffering organs," Morgagni called attention to the ways in which inner pathologies might be detected by taking a history or examining a patient. Not surprisingly, *De Sedibus* led to the development of routine techniques of physical examination, and eventually to the invention of the stethoscope in 1816. Another medical scribbler had raised the curtain on modern techniques of diagnosis and therapeutics.

The nineteenth century was the last in which progress in healing and the general dissemination of medical knowledge were delineated primarily by great books. Though journals were being established and professional meetings were being held with increasing frequency, a number of important volumes appeared, maintaining the old landmark tradition. The book I've chosen to represent the entire century, however, is not a volume in which new discoveries were presented, but one that has come to represent the acme of medical teaching. It had no effect on theory, or on comprehension of the biological basis of healing. It was strictly instructional.

Given ten seconds to answer, how would any reader of *The American Scholar* respond if asked to name a single medical textbook? Almost certainly, the reply would be, "Why, *Gray's Anatomy,* of course!" The answer would have

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been the same a century ago. Now in its thirty-ninth American edition, this workhorse of medical pedagogy has remained in everyday use far longer than any medical text of modern times, and it is likely to go on and on and on—as far as the futuristic eye can see. It outlives one after another of its editors, though most of its words and a multitude of its illustrations have not been significantly altered since 1858, when it was first published.

Yet the appearance of *Anatomy Descriptive and Surgical* (the actual title of Henry Gray's classic) drew a harsh, derisive critique in *The Boston Medical and Surgical Journal*, as *The New England Journal of Medicine* was then called. The scathing criticism of the reviewer took up fully half the journal's pages in two successive issues. Paragraph after paragraph described supposed errors and omissions. Of all the review's indictments, the most vehement was directed at Gray's illustrations. No doubt astonishing the medical students whose enthusiastic outpouring of pounds and dollars had made the book an immediate success, the reviewer disparaged the clarity of the drawings, their large number, even their very presence. To compound matters, he argued, Gray had chosen the worst possible course by labeling each structure in his pictures, rather than employing the footnoted numbers or letters customarily used by contemporary authors. That kind of pap made things too easy for medical students: clear, well-labeled diagrams would divert a young man's attention from a textbook's endless procession of sentences. "Let a student have general illustrations, and he will use them at the expense of the text," protested the reviewer. To the ascetic, puritan mind of the proper Bostonian, Gray's book looked like an illustrated road to pedagogical hell.

As other leading journals would note, that innovative way of presenting illustrations was one of the strengths of a book that had many other praiseworthy qualities. In striking contrast to its rival American periodical, *The Lancet* ended a laudatory review with a line that remains as true in 2001 as it was in 1858: "As a full, systematic, and advanced treatise on anatomy, combining the various merits of the volumes of many countries, scientifically excellent, and adapted to all the wants of the student, we are not acquainted with any work in any language, which can take equal rank with the one before us."

Who was the carping American critic, and what explains his fierce animosity toward a book whose advent was recognized by almost all other reviewers as a significant event in medical education—a book that elicited such an enthusiastic response from the students and practitioners for whom it was meant? The two-part screed is signed with the single letter *H.* That letter is as revealing as the *A* with which Nathaniel Hawthorne had startled American readers only a few years earlier. Gray's literary assassin was almost surely Harvard's Professor of Anatomy, Oliver Wendell Holmes, no mean scribbler himself. Who but Holmes would have been chosen to critique a major new textbook in his specialty for an important Boston journal? Who else would have been granted half the pages of two issues? And who else, rejecting the anonymity assumed by virtually all of the medical reviewers of his day, would have signed his work with a single initial, doubtless certain that his readers would easily identify him (and perhaps confident that the authority of his name would quash any objections to *his* objections)?

A clue to Holmes's motives may lie in a valedictory speech that the Autocrat of the Breakfast Table gave when he retired from the presidency of the Boston Medical Library in 1889. Holmes spoke of his reverence for a book familiarly known as "Sharpey and Quain," the foremost anatomy text of his teaching days. Holmes thought of that book, and two other anatomical tomes, as "the stepping stones of my professional life." His donation of those volumes to the library on that parting day "costs me a little heartache to take leave of such old and beloved companions." Could it be that the Autocrat's attack on the new textbook was motivated by his apprehension that it would displace his revered literary mainstay as *the* text for the instruction of medical students?

Gray's Anatomy would become a classic of pedagogical literature, one of the healing profession's truly great books. Dr. Holmes, ensconced on high among the immortals of American medicine, might be chagrined to find that the volume he so mercilessly maligned is familiar to all modern-day medical students, while the earth-shaking works of Vesalius, Harvey, and Morgagni are all but unknown to them.

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JOURNAL

Santa Rosa Island, 1998

GRETEL EHRLICH

For two years, I "cowboyed" on Santa Rosa Island, one of the Channel Islands off Central California. Santa Rosa had been ranched by a single family for nearly a century, but after its acquisition by the National Park Service in the 1980s, a policy of phasing out all livestock, ostensibly for the protection of endangered native plants, was unnecessarily accelerated, and a century of California ranching history came to a halt.

August 19. Rough crossing. Stood on port side with Jesús Bracamontes, one of the vaqueros, and basked in the sun. Sometimes the boat tipped down so far we were horizontal, standing on water. A flying fish zoomed by like a piece of light, and four least terns. A seal was asleep on a raft of seaweed, like a dog sitting on top of a tree. The vaqueros are coming back to the island from their vacation back home in Mexico, a little fatter, and with eager smiles—except for Jesús, who has been on his rancho digging a well by hand, at age 72. Let's keep going, I say to him. Let's make this boat go down the coast of Mexico. His eyes brighten. Good idea. Because *mi corazon es muy malo,* I tell him. Ben, my friend and lover, has left me.

August 21. Yesterday a sorrel horse with a blaze was cut away from its best friend to be shipped tomorrow to the mainland, where he'll be either sold or canned. That is the fate of these animals now that the Park had ordered everything off this island. The horse whinnied all night and all morning, pacing a mile of fence line, trying to catch a glimpse of his friend, a mare he had been born next to, grown up with, never parted from. Today his sorrow is also mine. Ben is gone.

August 22. Sunday morning. Nights and days of rawness, burning, as if my whole being had been seared. Everyone has gone back to the mainland except me, the foreman, and the vaqueros. We eat beans and rice, salad and tortillas in the cookhouse. Jesús walks me home. He is so elegant, a natural horseman, a gentleman. On the way he asks me to marry him and I say no, that would not be possible, and he asks if it's because he is Mexican and I say no, it isn't that, and he asks if it's because he's so old and I say, no, not that either, and he asks if he can kiss me when we get to the ranch house and I say yes, and after, he says, "Ah, Mamita, I'll remember this kiss forever."

August 23. Now it is mine, this island, this loneliness, which I know to be only a fiction of sorts—not the island, but the illusion that there is anything but the indestructibility of impermanence. Nevertheless, I am alone here. The wind blows. An old pine bends against the white house. When the ravens come, they come for me, black, sleek, wraithlike. Sun is hot, wind is feisty, dust softens the cliffs and erases waves. How good it would feel to be erased today.

August 25. The wind roars. Sometime in the middle of the night a jet helicopter comes to pick up a fisherman whose boat went down. The old familiar sound of the thumping blade reminds me of Greenland. The clouds come in and the wind tears itself in half, rattling from the northwest and coming back on itself from

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the other direction, one battling the other. We are all two selves, the wild hermit and the social, sexual being seeking unity. But all is unified already, always was. The night I sat next to Stephen Hawking at the concert and his breathing machine clicked in perfect contrapuntal time with the Bach fugue, and he smiled.

Today the ravens visit early. No warnings, just a casual hello. They check the yard for gifts of food or glitter—a stray diamond in the grass would do. Last week a peregrine falcon took a songbird out of the air in front of my horse. The birds go, but the ghosts of this island stay: Howard the cook, who burned up in the cookhouse; the wives of cowboys who couldn't stand the wind. Jesús tells me one of them killed herself in the room where I'm sleeping, so at night I should talk to her. Twelve sorrel horses appear from out of the windbreak and run fast past the house, the vaqueros on horseback behind them, at full tilt, yelling.

Then the rain comes, a single drop blown from a hurricane in Mexico as if to say that Ben is still a torment, a whirling dervish that provides no calm in a day. Bill (the foreman), his wife, and I drive to Old Ranch to check on the broodmares. We find three mares, three live foals, and one dead one. The salt grass is green, overlaid with wild oats like unruly hair. This is our favorite part of the 54,000-acre island, the place where we come for solace. A slough lined with ducks gives out to sand dunes beyond which schooners once anchored. "This is a hell of a good place for a horse to die," Bill mutters, implying that he'd like being buried there as well. He just had his sixty-ninth birthday.

Later. How the wind slices down, how it tears across the stomach, how everything retreats, and it fills the vacuum.

August 26. Fog in. Wind stopped. A horse whinnies. Twenty-three horses are being shipped today to be killed on the mainland. Jesús and I will go with them on the boat. We will say good-bye to them there. It is an unthinkable end to horses who have been born and raised and ridden all their lives on this island, who have given themselves to us so selflessly, who have tried to work hard and to please us, to do what we ask of them. "If I had my way I'd take them down to the beach one evening and give them each a big bucket of oats and do away with them there," Bill says. He wipes away tears from his wind-hardened face. "The Park sons of bitches only know how to manage by killing—first the slaughter of the deer from helicopters, then spraying with herbicides. My God, do they know how many birds and bugs they've killed off? And now the horses. They say it's because they're 'exotics.' Well, what the hell do they think *they* are? They weren't born here, but they think it's 'theirs.'"

September 4. Rustic joys. No one arrives. Wind blows. Scorching hot days followed by lightning. Thunder and rain last night, remnants from another Mexican hurricane—a *tormenta*, Jesús says. I drink red wine and listen to Ray Charles singing Leon Russell songs. Exquisite! I'm not out of my body; I'm so far in that the mind cannot comment any further, and I do a wild, barefoot, single-bodied dance on the grass, where the ravens fence-watch my apocalyptic gaiety, at summer's end, before snowfall. Derek Walcott reminds me in a poem that "the stream's bliss / contradicts the self-importance of despair."

September 15. All words are thoughts. All thoughts are mistakes, the random outcome of typos. That's how a whole language could be made, and from it new thoughts would occur. So much language obfuscates. To think without language, ahhhh, that's the way. I'm more and more eager for its complete absence. Instead, I'll let the strings of peptides, cardiac cells, eye cells, do the flashing on and off. Tonight I think I'll shine a flashlight on the backs of my knees, which will tell my body to produce melatonin. Then I'll sleep and be happy.

September 25. Evening. The L-shaped cabin on the leeward side of the island is the only embrace I know. Look, the clouds are empty. The sun at the horizon balloons out like a red saucer, then drops. A new moon sets early, chasing the sun. Basho writes: *Kono michi ya / yuku hito nashi ni / aki no kure.* Along this road / there are no travelers / Darkness in autumn.

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Materials received by October 25 will be assured of full consideration. Nominations and expressions of interest, which will be treated in confidence, should be sent to: Search Committee for the Director, National Humanities Center, 7 Alexander Drive, P.O. Box 12256, Research Triangle Park, North Carolina 27709-2256.

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• BOOKS •

When I was growing up in Michigan, my mother was the great reader in my family, and my father, though deeply creative in his professional life, did not read at all. I worked out a big part of my Oedipal conflict, if that's what it was, by becoming a reader myself. I found my way to my mother by heeding her signals; I turned to the authors she loved—at least those I could read—and soaked up whatever approval came my way. I imagined I saw my father scowling in the background.

My mother not only read—daily and with steady fixation—but also spoke with open reverence about writers, relishing the sound of their names and book titles and the bits of lore she gleaned from the biographies she devoured. I knew about Hemingway and Hadley, Isak Dinesen and her coffee plantation, Steinbeck and his dog Charley, long before I'd read any of these writers myself. All the news, however, came to me in the home language, Latvian, so that my own first encounters with my mother's authors—Wolfe, Maugham, London, and others—always carried a tinge of strangeness laid over the base of familiarity.

The effect of her devotion and the immersions it compelled—apart from the sheer pleasure of time spent in a vivid elsewhere—was to impress on me the idea that there was nothing finer, nothing worthier, than reading, except, of course, the writing that made reading possible.

REREADING

Love's Wound, Love's Salve

SVEN BIRKERTS

While my mother loved a great many books and writers, she reserved a special reverence—so it seemed to me—for a handful of authors from her youth in Riga, especially those she had first read in her own early years as part of a series called Lielie Ziemeļnieki (Great Northerners), all issued, as she described them to me many times, in handsome uniform bindings: Sigrid Undset, Selma Lagerlöf, but above all others, Knut Hamsun, his *Hunger, Mysteries, Victoria,* and *Pan*, those works of desperate lyrical romanticism.

I offer this as prologue to help explain why my encounter in late adolescence with *Pan*—to my mind still one of the most heart-wrenching novels ever written—should have seemed so intense, so intended. I was not just reading a novel; I was also somehow making inroads on what I imagined was my mother's secret inner terrain. I was finding a connection to a world that predated me; in the process, I could feel myself putting down the first frail roots of my own private life.

People sometimes speak of those rare charged encounters between reader and book when ready tinder is touched by the flame point of a particular vision. The image describes something of my original experience with this most harrowing of Hamsun's early works. For *Pan,* published when its author was still in this thirties, is nothing if not the most numbingly pure distillation of a young heart's passion, of raw emotion unchecked by the rationalizations and deferrals that experience teaches.

As it happens, I read this little novel in the depths of my own most lovelorn summer. I was

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sixteen and abjectly in love with K. Tall, blond, dreamily pretty, K. was two classes behind me, very nearly still a girl, though she possessed the disconcerting poise you sometimes find in the truly beautiful, poise that can almost seem like submission to an unsolicited gift.

I hid my passion. I had to, for it would have chased K. away, and I could not imagine not being able to be near her. K.—this was very clear—saw herself as my friend, my companion in reverie, a fellow seeker. On summer nights, after a long day of working in a candy warehouse, I would drive to the Cranbrook School, where her father was the dean of students, and she and I would walk around the grounds, circling the lake in the growing twilight, me at every second aware of the nearness of her bare shoulder, the sway of her long hair, the little modulations of tone when she laughed at my jokes. I dreamed of my fingers brushing that skin, but I did not dare the slightest inclination in her direction. Later, though, driving home down Lone Pine Road, windows open to the night, or lying on my back in my stark and stuffy little room, I felt I would break apart if something did not happen soon.

It was in this state that I first read—gulped down—Hamsun's novel and found myself transported into a sadness from which it seemed there could be no return, that felt, suddenly, like my first earned wisdom, confirmation of the fact that life touched by the genius of love was ultimately not to be endured.

Hamsun opens with the account—seemingly innocent, contemplative, transparent—of one Lieutenant Glahn, who would have us believe he is passing the time setting down a few recollected episodes from a summer that has already taken on the character of a dream.

> These last few days I have thought and thought of the Nordland summer's endless day. I sit here and think of it, and of a hut I lived in, and of the forest behind the hut; and I have taken to writing about it, just for my own amusement and to while away the time. Time drags; it does not pass as quickly as I should like, though I have no cares and lead the gayest of lives. I am perfectly content with everything, and thirty is no great age. A few days ago I received a couple of bird's feathers from far away, from one who need not have sent them; just two green feathers folded in a sheet of paper with a coronet on it and fastened with a seal. It amused me to see two so fiendishly green feathers. Otherwise there is nothing to trouble me except a touch of arthritis now and then in my left foot, the result of an old shot wound that healed up long ago.
>
> I remember that time went much faster two years ago, incomparably faster than now; the summer was gone before I realized it. It was two years ago, in 1855—I want to write about it to amuse myself—that something happened to me: or else I dreamt it.

Glahn would have us believe that he is a man at peace, but even an unsophisticated reader—such as I surely was in that long ago summer of 1968—must grasp that these are the bravely bitter posturings of a man looking to master his pain. Phrases like "for my own amusement" and "although I have no cares" are, we know, standard-issue denials; but just in case we don't pick this up, there is the protruding giveaway "Otherwise there is nothing to trouble me," confirming, lest we doubt it, that the receipt of the two green feathers was not an unalloyed pleasure. The beauty and power of *Pan* lies in how completely the gradually revealed emotional lacerations come to contradict Glahn's adopted pose.

The outer contour of Glahn's summer, the slight stuff of plot, is easily sketched in. Glahn is, by temperament, one of life's great romantic solitaries. Taking a break from the larger world, living in a forest hut near a small Norwegian trading village, he passes his summer alone, with only his beloved dog Aesop for company. When he is hungry, he hunts. Otherwise, he whiles away the endless hours daydreaming in his hut or wandering about in the forest, communing with nature in fugues of such pantheistic intensity that it seems at times he will simply merge with the great green Other: "Over by the edge of the forest there is fern and monk's hood, the heather is in bloom and I love its small flowers. I thank God for every heather flower I have ever seen; they have been like tiny roses on my path and I weep for love of them."

It cannot last, this perfect peace, this ecstatic natural concord. Into Eden comes Eve, in the

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form of Edvarda, the young daughter of Herr Mack, owner of the village trading post. She appears at Glahn's hut one day in the company of the stolidly pretentious man called simply the Doctor. He and Edvarda have been out walking and have decided to pay a call on Glahn.

The three talk awkwardly, moving from subject to subject, and it is only when the visitors have left that we are allowed to grasp the intense fixity with which Glahn has been regarding Edvarda: "Suddenly I saw before me her brown face and brown neck. She had tied her apron low on her hips to accentuate the length of her body, as was fashionable. Her thumb had a chaste and girlish look about it that touched me; and the few wrinkles on her knuckles were full of kindliness. She had a generous mouth, and her lips were red." This, we realize, is not the fruit of idle observation, but something else. These details have been gathered by the eye of the avid soul, the same eye that casts abroad in the forest for intimations of our higher connectedness.

The attraction proves to be mutual, whereupon, in keeping with the ancient principle of romantic magnetism, operative whenever two people think only of each other, Glahn and Edvarda are soon encountering one another everywhere—on the forest paths, down in the village. Here is the pure intoxication of young love, and if the particulars vary slightly across the surface, deep down they are subject to the delicious lifts and plunges of the universal erotic dance:

> "You are happy today, you are singing," she says, and her eyes sparkle.
>
> "Yes, I am happy," I answer. "You have a smudge of something on your shoulder there, it's dust, from the road perhaps. I want to kiss it—no, please, let me kiss it! Everything about you arouses tenderness in me, I am quite distracted by you. I didn't sleep last night."
>
> And that was true; for more than one night I had lain sleepless.

Edvarda takes the first deeper initiative. She comes to Glahn's hut and, declaring her full passion, stays the night and plants the barb of the hook so that it will never be extricated.

The congruence, the easy blending of their affections is soon—who knows why—pushed into a terrible discontinuity. Glahn catches the first intimation: "Sometimes there would be a night when Edvarda stayed away; once she stayed away for two nights. Two nights. There was nothing wrong, and yet I had the feeling that my happiness had passed its peak." Whether this is an illustration of what Proust called "the intermittencies of love"—as if affection were a flame that must rise and fall—or simply something perverse in the deep down nature of things, some fateful coupling of eros and sadism, the idyll of Glahn and Edvarda changes track almost as soon as it has begun.

Now follows the mad Lawrentian combat of the wills. Edvarda pulls away; Glahn suffers, sulks, practices his own stratagems of indifference. Then, just when he is strengthening toward a new resolve, ready to cut her loose, Edvarda flashes the ray of her vulnerable sweetness and Glahn is drawn back into the circuit of wanting and hoping.

Sitting near Glahn on a group outing to a nearby island, Edvarda admires the beautiful feathers he uses for tying flies. Glahn promptly gives her two. "Please take them," he says, "let them be a memento." But later, when they are returning in a rowboat together, Glahn seizes Edvarda's shoe and flings it far out over the water. He does not begin to understand his own impulse. The air between them is crackling with disturbance.

So things continue for a time—sightings, meeting, rebuffs, spasms of searing jealousy whenever Glahn sees Edvarda giving her attention to another. The tension pushes them apart. Edvarda no longer comes to the hut at night. Glahn wanders about, disconsolate, but all obvious emotion is thrust below the waterline; he betrays none of his feelings when they chance to meet. As readers, however, we need no compass. We can reckon the state of his heart from his erratic actions, his distractedness, his willed affair with another village girl. Nothing avails this poor man. His erotic grief has no way to discharge itself, and as it builds he is driven ever more irretrievably into himself.

Weeks then pass without encounter; summer is slowly winding down. As the time for Glahn's departure draws near, the pressure of his longing and frustration grows almost intolerable for the reader.

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Then, just days before he must go, he unexpectedly meets Edvarda at the counter of the village store:

> I greeted her, and she looked up but did not answer. Then it occurred to me that I did not want to ask for bread while she was there; I turned to the assistants and asked for powder and shot. While these were being weighed I kept my eye on her.
>
> A grey dress, much too small for her, its button holes worn; her flat breast heaved desperately. How she had grown during the summer! Her brow was pensive, those strange arched eyebrows were set in her face like two riddles, all her movements had become more mature. I looked at her hands, the expression in her long, delicate fingers affected me powerfully and made me tremble.

On the day of his departure, almost as an afterthought—so he portrays it—Glahn decides he must say farewell to Edvarda. He finds her at home, sitting with a book. His news seems to startle her, though we pick up but the slightest hint:

> "Glahn, are you going away? Now?"
>
> "As soon as the ship comes." I seize her hand, both her hands, a senseless rapture takes possession of me and I burst out "Edvarda!" and stare at her.
>
> And in an instant she is cold, cold and defiant.

Edvarda can only say: "To think you are leaving already." A moment later she adds: "Who will come next year, I wonder?" Whereupon she seats herself with her book. The interview is over.

But no—suddenly, perversely, she rises to her feet again with a parting request.

> "I should like something to remind me of you when you have gone," she said. "There was something I thought of asking you for, but perhaps it is too much. Will you give me Aesop?"
>
> Without reflecting I answered "Yes."

Later, alone in his hut, Glahn agonizes over his decision:

> Why had she asked me to come and bring the dog myself? Did she want to talk to me, tell me something for the last time? I had nothing more to hope for. And how would she treat Aesop? Aesop, Aesop, she will torment you! Because of me she will whip you, caress you too perhaps, but certainly whip you in and out of season and utterly destroy you. . . .
>
> I called Aesop, patted him, put our two heads together and searched for my gun. He was already whining with pleasure, thinking we were going out hunting. Again I put our two heads together, placed the muzzle against Aesop's neck and fired.
>
> I hired a man to carry Aesop's body to Edvarda.

So much for Glahn's coy disingenuousness: "It amused me to see two so fiendishly green feathers." Indeed. Has Nordic stoicism, the most indurate of all stoicisms, ever showed itself more starkly? Has the blade of unrequited love ever turned quite so painfully in its wound? When I read these words I was in the grip, I then imagined, of my passion for my own Edvarda. K., so shy to begin with, would grow perceptibly more aloof whenever I brought myself the slightest bit closer to risking some admission. Now I understood; Hamsun had given me the hard news about love. And about life—for in the wake of such utter devastation it seemed there was little point in anything else. I took that sadness down into the center of my heartsick summer and incubated it there.

Pan concludes with a section called "Glahn's Death: A paper from the year 1861." Six years later, in other words. The short section comes to us in the voice of a bitter comrade of Glahn's ("But Thomas Glahn had his faults, and I am not disposed to conceal them, since I hate him"), a man who first met the lieutenant two years earlier somewhere in India or Ceylon. The gist of the "paper"—a confession, or self-exoneration, of sorts—is that the mysterious and erratic Glahn, after befriending him, set about systematically goading him, setting up a situation in which the man would have no choice but to shoot him. One day when they are out hunting together he did just that:

> The court entered his name and the circumstances of his death in a stitched and bound register, and in that register is written

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that he is dead, I tell you, yes, and even that he was killed by a stray bullet.

How can we ever gauge the effects of a work like this on a susceptible young reader? I was shaken to the core. I was just sixteen; I had no wisdom to hold against this vision of hopelessness, no mitigating perspective. I had only the riot of my own emotions, the certainty that if K. would not recognize and greet my love I would have nothing to get me through my life. The only thing that cut against my despair was my hope. K. and I were still seeing each other, walking and talking; she was still hearing out my thoughts and confidences. Somehow I would bring her to see who I was, how I loved her.

I never did. K. told me one day in late July that she was going away for a month with her family. I swallowed the sudden absence like some horrid emetic—I had no choice—and I resolved to wait. While she was gone I did everything I could to make myself into the person she would want to be with. I lost weight. I whittled my soul into something sharp and fierce. But when summer ended, when she returned, I had changed. I have no explanation for what happened. Time had worked its decisive will: I had miraculously moved away from wanting her. When, a few weeks later, someone else suddenly appeared in my life, I gave everything I had hoarded to her.

Still, I was not able to look at *Pan* for many years. It compressed so much of my pain, my longing, in its pages, and even the receding memory was a threat. My deepest unhappiness was secreted there. And I had the superstition that if I were to open the cover and glance at the words, I might somehow come unstitched. The book was put away. And when I went to college, moving my prize possessions, mainly books, from one place to another, I did not bring *Pan* with me.

Just a month ago, imagining myself ready to write about the novel, I bought a marked-up paperback and, in a spirit of edgy curiosity, began to read. I expected that I would prevail over the romanticism; that its mainspring—Glahn's brooding stoicism—would now strike me as forced; that his communings with nature would seem overheated. I was armed to the teeth.

And utterly powerless. For such is the power of a book, a memory, that it can in a flash outwit any structure or system we have raised against it. I had, yes, steeled myself against Glahn, against the sorrow of his story, against his complete destruction by the passion that had erupted in his unguarded heart. I had not, however, braced against the encounter with myself, the sixteen-year-old who went at the world, at the dream of love, with such unscreened intensity. I read *Pan*, but the person I met on those woodland paths was my feverish younger self. I felt sorrow from the first sentence on, sorrow so sweet and piercing that it was hard to turn the pages. Worse, though—for sorrow recollected can bring a certain pleasure—was my self-reproach. As I read I indicted myself. I had, in stages, without ever planning it, traded off that raw nerved-up avidness. I'd had to, of course; it was inevitable. We do not survive the dream of love, not at that pitch. We build in our safeguards and protective reflexes. We give in to the repetitions, let them gradually tame the erratic element. We grow wise and balance—or perish. Still, to encounter the stalking ghost of the self here, now, at midlife . . .

But no, I have found the rationale, the way to understand. Indeed, when it came to me I felt a great rush of relief. "This is *not* the tragic truth of things." I actually said it out loud. I remember. I was walking along a scenic path in Bennington, Vermont, just two weeks ago, trying to make sense of this old business for the hundredth time in my life.

The thought formed itself so clearly. What Hamsun offered was not the final truth, because whatever it told about love, it somehow left out the people who do the loving. *Pan* is the legend of desire feasting upon itself, struggling against itself, turning on itself to eradicate the unendurable pain, the source of all wanting. Glahn and Edvarda are just figures in the dance. They have nothing to hold up against the pulverizing momentum in their separate souls. They have, I saw it now, no . . . relationship. And realizing this saved me from the harshest effects of my sadness, allowed me to close the book up around the beautiful black feather I keep as a bookmark, allowed me my equanimity, which is now punctured, but not riddled, by secret doubts.

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Candidates must hold a doctorate and have a record of scholarly publication. NIAS Fellowships are residential fellowships and are granted only for a full research year, from **1 September - 30 June**. All fellowships are awarded on the recommendation of a Scholarship Committee, whose members are appointed by the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences.

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Scholars and researchers who wish to apply for a fellowship at NIAS can obtain an application form from the Institute. This must be submitted **18 months** before the opening date of the research year for which they wish to apply. Applicants will be asked to provide a résumé of their scholarly career and a description of the work they propose to carry out at NIAS.

Applications may be addressed to the Rector of NIAS, Professor H.L. Wesseling, NIAS, Meijboomlaan 1, 2242 PR Wassenaar, The Netherlands.

For further information please contact: **Mr. Jos Hooghuis**, Secretary to the Scholarship Committee, or consult our website.

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The Next Next Thing

ALEX SOOJUNG-KIM PANG

EMERGENCE: THE CONNECTED LIVES OF ANTS, BRAINS, CITIES, AND SOFTWARE
By Steven Johnson. Scribner. $25.

Silicon Valley's boosters sometimes claim that the region is the imperial Rome or Victorian London of high technology, ground zero of a new era in history and economics. Steven Johnson, author of the new book *Emergence: The Connected Lives of Ants, Brains, Cities, and Software,* would argue that it's more like an ant colony. He means it in a good way: ants are geniuses at what Johnson calls "emergent" behavior, a phenomenon in which simple activities undertaken by individuals generate complex behavior in populations. Silicon Valley is a tangled bank of high-tech companies, venture capitalists, and a thousand kinds of specialists who swarm around a problem or product, break away, and re-form around something else. Specialization and collaboration are a part of life. People regularly change jobs, and engineers at competing firms sometimes work together on knotty problems; the result is a rich cross-fertilization of technical knowledge.

Silicon Valley's social rules don't flow from the top down, but from the bottom up. The notion that the region follows no master plan has been a hard one to grasp: failed Silicon Prairies, Forests, and Fjords dot the globe. But why, in an age of fax machines and e-mail, do such communities exist at all? Why do high-tech companies put up with overcrowding, high rent, and the proximity of competitors who can lure away employees and clients? The answer is that companies don't create clusters so much as clusters create companies. Indeed, at their best, such concentrations seem to generate a collective intelligence that is far larger and longer-lived than its inhabitants.

A single ant foraging for food, dealing with threats, and communicating with other ants is pretty unimpressive, but when thousands of ants get together, their colonies possess their own personalities and problem-solving talents. Those qualities survive far longer than ants themselves: an ant may live a year, but a colony's life is measured in decades. No one directs this transformation. It happens naturally. Self-organization, adaptability, clustering, evolution: these are the building blocks of emergence.

The field of emergence has been building momentum over the last several decades, as researchers in computer science, biology, neurology, and other fields have stumbled on the same phenomena, borrowed each other's tools or formulas, gathered in places like the Santa Fe Institute, and collaborated on new problems. (One of the interesting things about the field is that it has lots of brilliant contributors, but no central intellectual figure, no Galileo or Einstein. The discipline itself displays some of the qualities it studies.) Johnson argues that the same process that turns ants into ant colonies is also visible in the dynamics, described by Jane Jacobs in her classic *Death and Life of Great American Cities,* of vibrant neighborhoods and regions. And software designers are starting to harness complexity to solve problems, create vivid virtual worlds, and make the World Wide Web more manageable.

Indeed, Johnson senses that ideas about self-organization and complexity are poised to break out from the world of science into our culture at large, and challenge the primacy of mechanistic and hierarchical models in our

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thinking about nature, society, and even art. *Emergence* is partly a report from the frontiers of science, partly an attempt to quicken the revolution, partly a literary embodiment of the qualities of emergence itself. Each chapter has an official subject, but Johnson is never constrained by his own structure: he's interested more in telling vivid stories than in unwinding one long argument. This apparent disorganization allows Johnson to play to his strengths as a wordsmith while concealing a deeper purpose: the jumps are intended to get you to think about how emergence operates in biological systems, in software, and in human history. Underneath the informal, Web-surfing fluidity of the prose lurks shrewd calculation. This gives the book a special measure of intensity, but it also forces Johnson to go out on some precarious literary and intellectual limbs.

In science writing there is a long tradition of leaping the divide between C. P. Snow's "two cultures" by drawing parallels between domains that are "supposed" to be different: computer science and Bach, particle physics and Zen, relativity and Cubism. An important unwritten rule is that you stick to high culture; you don't explore the parallels between the Copenhagen School and Led Zeppelin. *Emergence* blithely ignores this rule. Its terrain—urban sociology, entomology, the Internet, and computer games—and Johnson's style make these pages sound more like the Kronos Quartet than like the Guarneri. Even riskier is the epistemological path the book takes. The scientific work on self-organization and complexity has been highly mathematical, and much of the field's legitimacy—and its most spectacular achievements—rests on the ability to build sophisticated computer models that both quantify and realistically simulate the behavior of complex phenomena. It's one thing to explain complexity theory, as Stewart Kaufmann or John Casti (two prominent figures in the field) do in their books; Johnson essentially has to create a non-mathematical, qualitative, almost intuitive version of complexity, and then apply it to entirely new fields.

The problem with this approach is most apparent in the discussion of cities. Johnson sees them as the human equivalent of ant colonies: the economic and defensive imperatives that drive people into cities yield patchworks of

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neighborhoods and the development of functions that transcend those original needs. Manchester grew at a phenomenal pace during the Industrial Revolution, but until the 1840s, it lacked the administrative apparatus of a city: it essentially was a "feudal estate, with no local government to speak of." Fantastically overcrowded, polluted, and dynamic, it was also, as Friedrich Engels noted, "peculiarly built, so that someone can live in it for years . . . without ever coming into contact with a working-class quarter." He continued, "I have never come across so systematic a seclusion of the working class from the main streets as in Manchester" even though it "has been built less according to a plan and less within the limitations of official regulations—and indeed more through accident—than any other town." No central plan, just thousands of people clustering together, making local decisions that have large-scale effects: this is emergence in action.

It's a compelling picture, one that many urban denizens will feel has something going for it, but I wasn't entirely satisfied. Saying that a machine works because of physics is right, but it's not very illuminating; the experience of playing computer games like Sim City, which borrow from complexity theory, suggests *Emergence* is on the right track, but doesn't prove the case. Also, the three examples *Emergence* discusses in greatest detail—industrial Manchester, Renaissance Florence, and modern New York—may not be enough to support grand generalizations. The megacities of the new global world—places like Mumbai, Lagos, Beijing, and Cairo—are inventing the future as chaotically as Manchester, and it would be illuminating to compare their development with that of Johnson's trio. Even a look around the United States complicates the picture. Philadelphia is famous as a city of neighborhoods, but that's been as much a liability as a virtue in its history. In contrast, West Coast cities have stubbornly refused to grow old-fashioned downtowns and pedestrian-friendly neighborhoods, but support Hollywood and Silicon Valley.

Johnson is much stronger when writing about the worlds created by software. This is hardly surprising: his 1997 book *Interface Culture* established him as the Henry-Russell Hitchcock of his field, a critic who takes seriously a realm that others have viewed in more purely utilitarian or technical terms. This time, Johnson considers the programming behind online communities, recommendation agents (which generate those helpful suggestions on Amazon.com and other commercial Web sites), and digital environments that allow software to evolve rather than be written. A decade ago, online communities were small enough to manage their affairs informally; as they grew, it became harder to maintain a sense of intimacy. Like overcrowded restaurants, many online discussion sites or bulletin boards were ruined by their own popularity. A few sites, however, discovered that simple organizing rules could be built into their software, making it possible to maintain a sense of quality and coherence even when fifty thousand people were talking all at once. For example, contributors to Slashdot rate each other's postings, and those who are highly respected gain additional privileges: the site becomes a marketplace of ideas. Slashdot is also self-managing: no one is in charge, and no one has to be, as the software generates higher-level organization from individual activity. This system replaces the informal social rules and cues that we use to guide a conversation or choose a neighborhood: it and similar technologies, Johnson argues, are the building blocks of emergence on the World Wide Web, the tools with which we can create the equivalent of cities in cyberspace.

Other software designers are using the tools of self-organization to create more realistic and challenging computer games. Traditionally, the computer villains against whom players were pitted had a limited, predictable range of skills and tactics, but new games use neighbor interaction and evolution to create virtual opponents who learn the player's habits, work together, and develop new talents. In so doing, they turn gaming strategy upside down. Playing Nintendo for eighty hours taught you how the bad guys always reacted: in these next-generation games, the bad guys spend those hours learning how to react to you. In this new world, players survive through improvisation, not memorization. Even more radical are experiments in creating software through evolutionary processes. In one famous experiment, computer scientist Danny Hillis designed what was effectively an ecology in which programs that sorted random numbers could evolve accord-

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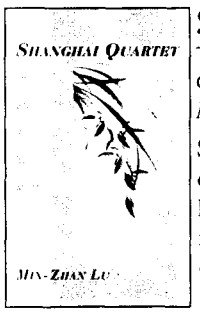
ing to Darwinian rules. Thousands of randomly generated programs were introduced into the system; the most successful were crossed with one another, yielding a new batch of slightly stronger programs. Several thousand generations later, this digital ecosystem contained sorting programs that rivaled the best ones written by humans.

We're still a long way from developing commercial products using these techniques. Still, evolutionary programming offers a dazzling prospect of software that is a kind of life form. The prospect leads to a bigger question: Will emergence change our understanding of nature, our digital lives, and our notions of intelligence? Will we live in online communities that co-evolve with their digital environments? It's too soon to say with any certainty: complexity theory is still a relatively young science, and evolutionary programming and adaptive game characters are interesting novelties. Still, the questions are provocative. As I read, it seemed to me that emergence might become a big thing, not just in select scientific circles but for many of us living in the high-tech world. Johnson doesn't quite explain what would finally trigger its explosion, but he provides the material to understand the process.

As Thomas Kuhn noted in his classic *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* a new paradigm may offer a greater degree of mathematical exactitude than its predecessors, or resolve a long-standing paradox in the field, but early adherents are attracted to it well before it can answer all the objections more traditionally minded scientists can throw at it. This seems to me to describe the state of emergence pretty well: it hasn't been applied very widely yet, but the work that has been done is highly suggestive, and there's something about it that more than a few scientists find exceptionally compelling. Most paradigm shifts affect only a narrow circle of researchers; the Copernican and Darwinian revolutions, with their far-ranging cultural and theological import, are exceptions to the rule. Will emergence be like Darwinism or like a thousand revolutions unobserved outside a few laboratories? The fact that bits of emergence can be seen in the work of thinkers like Adam Smith and Friedrich Engels suggests that it won't overthrow our standing notions of



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the way human affairs work. But the Scientific Revolution lasted at least two hundred years—to put it into perspective, the time elapsed between the French Revolution and the fall of the Berlin Wall. So it's possible that an emergence revolution is in the making already.

If it is, it will be the product of many tiny practical adjustments. As Margaret Jacob and other historians of the Scientific Revolution have noted, Newtonian mechanics had a tremendous impact on Western European culture not just because of the work of highly placed savants and scholars. The application of Newtonian mechanics to everyday problems in civil engineering, the use of machines specially designed to illustrate Newton's laws, and the publication of textbooks and popular accounts gave Newtonian physics an influence it would not have had had it been communicated only through mathematics. This suggests that the impact of emergence will depend on its application in the virtual worlds of information and imagination that we are creating in software, the World Wide Web, and the subcultures coalescing around these technologies. The more conscious we are of using tools that embody the principles of emergence, the more likely we are to take those principles to heart, and to work them into our everyday language and understanding of the world.

The popularity of the language of emergence may also depend on how it is used in the worlds of politics and business. Johnson touches only lightly on this, but like metaphors of evolution, metaphors of self-organization have long been popular in some circles because of their potential for justifying radical politics. It is no surprise that today's anti-globalism activists describe their unstructured, leaderless movement using the language of emergence: it sets the movement apart from the secret cabals of the financiers and industrialists who are the masterminds of globalization, and provides a powerful natural justification for its apparent disorganization. Likewise, in early-nineteenth-century Britain, Chartist and Socialist writers brewed a vision of self-directed biological and social progress from a mix of evolutionary theory, materialist philosophy, and radical politics. This highly charged science argued that populations evolved through cooperation, not competition, and emphasized the power of self-organization; by implication, it also denied the existence of God, along with the need for politicians, aristocrats, or an established Church. Such theories were very much part of the early Victorian scientific fringe (a space occupied today, in one of history's nicer ironies, by creationism), but they influenced such later scientists as Charles Darwin and Thomas Henry Huxley.

Both men were painted with radical colors in their day, but compared with their mob-leading predecessors, they were paragons of the establishment. Just as evolution's radical edges were tamed by Darwin and Huxley, so ideas about emergence may move from the anti-globalism movement to the mainstream. A visit to the Business and Management section of the bookstore shows that this is already starting. Management literature is notorious for its ability to absorb any trendy idea, but a small yet influential group of writers has embraced the use of self-organization in business, and argues that it will change the nature of leadership. According to this line of thought, markets and economies move too quickly for decisions to be made in headquarters: the old model of having information flow up to a central office, and policies radiate downward, is a formula for paralysis. Instead, leaders must set the basic rules, cultivate environments in which efficient low-level decision making can take place, and then step away and let the system find its own way. In effect, management becomes an exercise in creating cultures of anti-management.

So will *Emergence* become the equivalent of the catalogue for the 1929 Museum of Modern Art exhibit "The International Style," a popular work that helped define, and in some measure assisted, a revolution? The odds are against it, since intellectual revolutions are even harder to pull off than political ones. After all, you need more than a few tanks, control of the national TV station, and an army that will keep the capital buttoned up for a few weeks. You need people to learn to *think* differently, and that's notoriously difficult to impose from above. Hmmm. A revolution from the bottom up. Individual actions that produce high-level changes. You know, that sounds kind of like. . . . Who knows? Maybe it could happen.

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Beauty Myths

VENUS IN EXILE: THE REJECTION OF BEAUTY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY ART
By Wendy Steiner. The Free Press. $26.

Reviewed by EVELYN TOYNTON

"Death is the mother of beauty," wrote Wallace Stevens in "Sunday Morning" (though the idea hardly originated with him), and, in the same poem:

> And shall the earth
> Seem all of Paradise that we shall know?
> The sky will be much friendlier then than now . . .
> Not this dividing and indifferent blue.

In effect, Wendy Steiner's new book is a rebuttal of the first idea and, to an even greater degree, an argument for the second. She does not see why our definition of beauty should be muddled up with the yearning after some pure, unattainable perfection: the earth should be more than enough of Paradise for us to know. She wants us to develop a more psychologically healthy relationship to beauty: "It is the task of contemporary art and criticism," she says, "to imagine beauty as an experience of equality and empathy . . . the rewarding values of aesthetic experience [are] communication, mutuality, understanding."

Thus, Steiner rebels against the idea of the Kantian sublime, in all its "inhumanity," its "transcendance or annihilation of everyday reality." In her view, the very notion of the ideal is not only suspect, but implicitly misogynistic. She regards the hankering after purity that in art becomes an obsession with form over content as always, implicitly, a rejection of the female, and most of her book is taken up with a discussion of the woman-hatred inherent in the formalism of modernist art.

Steiner has some interesting things to say about the connection between the modernist painters' rejection of, on the one hand, the female subject and, on the other, the ornamental qualities they associated with femaleness. And she makes a wholly convincing case for the use of the fetish as their way of sneaking beauty back into formalist art while retaining their distance from it. But in her discussion of the replacement of the female form in art with more abstract ones, and the use of form itself as a distancing mechanism, she seems too intent on proving misogyny to pay attention to some of the other factors at work.

Mondrian spoke of abstraction in art as mirroring the general modern tendency toward abstraction; an argument can also be made that in turning away from the human (not just the female) subject, the modernists were grappling with an increasingly mechanized world. Similarly, their distrust of beauty, female and otherwise, can be seen as an expression of a more general spiritual malaise; certainly after the First World War, the pervasive mood was one of vast disillusionment with humanity.

Even if one accepts, however, that the formalism of the modernists was primarily a rejection of bourgeois femaleness, one is left with the problem of "equality" in art. Steiner objects to classical ballet, for instance, not only because it "insists on perfection of form and movement, divorcing dance from normal human motion," but for its "reinforcement of the very idea of inequality . . . why should the members of the chorus merge themselves into an undifferentiated entity, while the principal dancers are permitted to star as individuals?" This seems akin to asking, Why should Hamlet get all the best lines? Indeed, why should Wendy Steiner and I not be allowed to dance with the Kirov? "Equality and empathy," in this case compassion for the feelings of the chorus members, cannot always take precedence over formal considerations.

And then there is the question of whether what she calls the "heartless sublime" is in fact inhuman. There might, after all, be something in us—in women as well as men—that hankers after that kind of fierce transcendent purity rather than after gentle domestic beauty. Such yearnings may also be part of the experience of being human, which is why we respond to the kind of modernist "strategies" Steiner disapproves of so much; it's not just that we're being

Evelyn Toynton's novel, *Modern Art*, was published last year.

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bullied into admiring formalist art by the dictates of highbrow critics. Perhaps no art is going to satisfy all our different kinds of longing at once. It seems unnecessary to denigrate Matisse, as Steiner does, in order to praise Bonnard's art of "gentle bliss." In the interests of true "diversity"—which she applauds when it comes to representing minorities and outsiders and the disenfranchised in art—it ought to be possible to admire both.

But perhaps the main problem with the book is not that her central argument seems too reductive but that she appears, at times, to have lost sight of it herself. There is a disjointed, jumpy quality to *Venus in Exile,* a sense of someone frantically racing from one idea to the next, and too often those ideas seem only very loosely connected, a series of detours rather than a coherent whole. One could transpose whole huge sections of certain chapters from one place to another and not really notice the difference.

More troubling still, too many of her assertions seem questionable, or even downright wrong—and whereas one does not have to agree with an author's thesis, one does have to trust her basic judgment. Was Flaubert's dictum that "one should live like a bourgeois and think like a demi-god" really "hypocritical"? Does *Lolita* really reveal "the quandary of avant-garde aesthetics, championing freedom at the expense of meaning, value, and pleasure?" Did modernism, "despite its claims for the ideality of formal beauty, achieve instead an alienated, pornographic freedom?"

Certainly it is just plain inaccurate to claim that George Eliot "makes her complex heroines plain"—Gwendolen Harleth in *Daniel Deronda* is beautiful; chapter one of *Middlemarch* begins by telling us that Dorothea Brooke "had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress." And what are we to make of the statement that when Keats speaks of beauty as truth, he is referring to what "comes true," to the fact that we "value [art] as an earnest that our dreams might be realized in life?" This is surely a utilitarian, not to say a Hallmark-greeting-card, view of art. It seems more likely that we value it precisely because our dreams cannot be realized in life.

Finally, Steiner seems less interested in examining the evidence on its own merits than in making it fit her case. Thus, even her long, explication of *Frankenstein* as a conscious critique of the Kantian sublime, to which she refers repeatedly throughout the book, turns out to be a kind of cheat: tucked away in an endnote is an acknowledgment that Mary Shelley had not read the *Critique of Judgment* when she wrote *Frankenstein,* and that when she did read it she responded with admiration. One starts to wonder how many of the book's other arguments are based on such specious premises.

In her concluding chapter, Steiner makes a heroic effort, for the first time, to tackle what would seem to be the central question: "how beauty can be both a fostering experience of mortal existence and an elevating ideal written over reality." But once again, she is deflected. We hear about a play in which Picasso's various mistresses finally get to speak in their own right, about an art historian whose researches into the real life of the model—herself a painter—who posed for Manet's notorious "Olympia" led her to realize that she too had "emotionally and professionally contracted to fulfill the desires of others." Such projects may be admirable in their attempts to correct injustices or as therapeutic undertakings. They may even slightly alter our relationship to the works of art in question. But when Steiner says that "the models who understood this [that is, Picasso's and Manet's] sadistic aesthetics seem much more interesting than the dehumanizing geniuses mystified by it," it is hard to know in what sense she means it. Biographically more interesting? Spiritually? Intellectually? We do not have their artworks to look at, so we cannot say that they are more interesting as artists—and that's what we're supposed to be dealing with.

Similarly, Steiner's long, admiring discussion of the work of the feminist painter Marlene Dumas, which is itself a rebuttal of the idea of women as mere objects, cannot really persuade us that Dumas' didactic paintings of women are more satisfying to contemplate than Picasso's. One may find, in fact, that looking at Dumas' work makes one positively hunger for the kind of formalism Steiner deplores. If this is what the art of "empathy, equality, mutuality, communication" amounts to, then perhaps the sexism of the sublime, the misogyny of pure form, is a preferable alternative after all.

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Sorrow, Rage, Bitterness

RICHARD WRIGHT: THE LIFE AND TIMES
By Hazel Rowley. Henry Holt. $35.

Reviewed by JOHN FREEMAN

Speaking to his friend Anaïs Nin in the late 1940s, Richard Wright defended his rationale for exile: "I can only be useful as a writer . . . and as a writer [in America] I am strangled by petty humiliations, and daily insults. I am obsessed only with one theme. I need perspective. I need to get away from my personal hurts, my personal irritations. . . . I need to live free if I am to expand."

By 1953, on the eve of the publication of *The Outsider,* Wright had lived outside the United States for five years. He was riding high on revenues from two blockbuster bestsellers, *Native Son* (1940) and *Black Boy* (1945), each of which sold more than 250,000 copies in its first year and made him more money than the work of any black novelist before him. Although he went on to write another half-dozen books, none can rival *Native Son* and *Black Boy* in their naturalistic artistry and their provocative indictments of American injustice. His portrayal of the indignities of life on the racial fault line galvanized writers from Ralph Ellison to Gwendolyn Brooks to James Baldwin. As Baldwin succinctly put it, "In *Uncle Tom's Children,* in *Native Son,* and, above all, in *Black Boy,* I found expressed, for the first time in my life, the sorrow, the rage, and the murderous bitterness which was eating up my life and the lives of those around me."

The books also profoundly affected white audiences. When it was published, *Native Son* challenged readers to question their most fundamental assumptions about race. In telling the story of Bigger Thomas, an uneducated, petty thief who accidentally murders a white woman in her bedroom, Wright daringly brought to life a black man who demonstrates both sexual desire and anger. Violent racial conflict is one of Wright's recurring themes, and in *Black Boy* he explains why violence appealed to him as a child:

> I had already grown to feel that there existed men against whom I was powerless, men who could violate my life at will. I resolved that I would . . . conceal a weapon, pretend that I had been crushed by the wrong done to my loved ones; then, just when they thought I had accepted their cruelty as the law of my life, I would let go with my gun and kill as many of them as possible.

Wright sublimated these thoughts, and prose became his weapon.

In her competent, readable, but vexingly tepid *Richard Wright: The Life and Times,* Australian biographer Hazel Rowley barely scratches the surface of Wright's wrath, leaving untouched the internal conflict that animated his work. As critic Andrew Delbanco astutely noted in a 1991 essay in *The New Republic,* the "terrible honesty" of *Native Son* comes not from the novel's indictment of racism, but from its understanding of the way self-hatred may be learned from one's oppressor. Wright was intimately acquainted with the feelings thus produced: recalling his childhood in *Black Boy,* he writes "I used to mull over the strange absence of real kindness in Negroes, how unstable was our tenderness, how lacking in genuine passion we were . . . how lacking we were in those intangible sentiments that bind man to man, and how shallow was even our despair."

By steering clear of such complicated sentiments, Rowley inadvertently makes the case that Wright's main goal was to transcend his humble background. Born near Natchez, Mississippi in 1908, Wright grew up accustomed to the pinch of poverty. When his father abandoned the family, the boy was shipped off to an orphanage and then to Jackson, Mississippi, to live with his fundamentalist grandmother. Literature, as *Black Boy* attested, would save him from the clutches of the South. As a boy, he began sneaking books into the house; sometimes they would disappear, their ashes showing up later in the fireplace. In the winter of 1923, he wrote his first short story, "The Voodoo of Hell's Half-Acre," which was published in a black newspaper. He left Jackson at seven-

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teen, and after a one-year stint in Memphis, where he used a white man's library card to check out such volumes as H. L. Mencken's *Book of Prefaces,* he migrated to Chicago with his aunt Maggie, eventually bringing his mother, brother, and another aunt north to join him

Although often reported, some of the details of Wright's early working life still astonish. He weathered a range of menial jobs, from scrubbing floors to digging ditches to sorting mail. He was so fearful of being considered "uppity" that he carted books home from the library wrapped in newspaper. At twenty-two, tired of struggling to make a meager living, he enrolled in a tenth grade class (he had made it only through ninth grade), but had to drop out because of financial hardship. At home he devoured the classics, plowing through Frank Norris and Marcel Proust, even though four other family members crowded his one-bedroom tenement apartment. The fact that these details burn so brightly in the reader's mind is a testament less to Rowley, who merely borrows them from *Black Boy* and *American Hunger,* than to the power of Wright's reminiscences.

Considering the tight confines of Wright's existence, it's not surprising that he turned to communism. Rowley adequately describes his extensive involvement in the John Reed Club, a literary organization sponsored by the Communist Party, from the days he spent as a Party leader on Chicago's South Side to his public break with communism in 1944, as documented in *American Hunger.* In her depiction of Wright's evolution as a thinker, Rowley is less trustworthy. Before he became famous, Wright was intimate with such writers as Nelson Algren and Langston Hughes; though a few choice anecdotes are presented, we are given no sense of the depth of these friendships or their influence on his intellectual growth. Rowley also glosses over Wright's early novel *Lawd Today!,* a lesser work published posthumously in 1963, but still a fascinating glimpse of Wright's budding themes. She plays down the novel's potent, undeniable sexual element (its four male protagonists prowl a city in search of gratification), neglecting the singular, fleshly pulse that drives much of Wright's writing.

The biography's most extreme example of Rowley's lack of critical acumen concerns Wright's decision to allow the Book-of-the-Month Club to bowdlerize *Native Son.* In the novel, Mary Dalton, the woman Bigger Thomas accidentally kills, drunkenly comes on to Thomas, "moving her hips in a veritable grind." In another section, Bigger "polishes his nightstick" at a movie theater. The selection committee wanted these and several other sections edited out. Wright agreed to the changes, as he agreed five years later when the Book-of-the-Month Club requested the excision of *Black Boy*'s bleaker and more belligerent passages and suggested that Wright come up with a more salubrious ending. When Wright delivered a new draft to his agent, his recorded reaction to the Club's aggressive pruning was bizarrely mild: "Yet another copy of the book. I really feel this ought to do the thing."

Rather than examine the compromise, Rowley focuses on all the money this and other deals were bringing in. Flush from his successes—his earnings in 1940 translate into $750,000 in today's dollars—Wright put in bids on a farm in Vermont and a brownstone in Greenwich Village. His wife, Ellen, a Communist Party organizer whom he'd met in New York in 1939, had given birth to their first child, Julia, in 1942. Yet shortly after settling down in Manhattan in 1945, Wright was overcome by his usual manic restlessness, what he called in *Black Boy* his eternal urge to "escape a nameless fate seeking to overtake me." He packed up his family and sailed for France. In Paris, he mingled with Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Stein, and his ego swelled to the point that he agreed to play Bigger Thomas in an ill-advised screen adaptation of *Native Son,* whose failure Rowley blames on American censors.

Though Wright returned to writing full time, he was only fitfully productive in Paris, and reviews of his last three novels were decidedly mixed. Published in 1953, *The Outsider* was pilloried in intellectual circles; *Savage Holiday* (1954) and *The Long Dream* (1958), though well received in France, didn't fare much better in the U.S. Bouts with grippe and extramarital dalliances blotted Wright's years in France, too, but Rowley presents any problems or missteps as minor setbacks in a general march toward posthumous greatness, seeing grand inevitability in her subject's life trajectory. It's clear she wants to portray Wright as triumphant. Meanwhile, she lingers like a star-

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struck fan over descriptions of the Wrights' various farmhouses and Latin Quarter flats. Little of what she relates is surprising. Like other American expatriates, Wright enjoyed his finery: good bourbon, nice suits, and women (mostly white, including his wife). Since they are not interpreted in any revelatory way, these details function mostly as period decor.

Rowley's focus on lifestyle over life work would be a more trivial flaw were a critical re-evaluation not so urgently needed. It's been fifty-three years since James Baldwin destroyed his mentor's reputation—inadvertently, he always claimed—with the devastating essay "Everybody's Protest Novel," in which he critiqued *Native Son* as an example of protest literature, and therefore limited as art. In 1991, the Library of America reissued Wright's oeuvre, reinstating sections that had been deleted from some of the works. The texts that emerged were bolder, rawer, and even more "shattering," as Delbanco noted, than before. *Black Boy* and *American Hunger* were grouped together in one volume, and the juxtaposition shows Wright to be a far darker and more subversive social critic than was previously understood. While *Black Boy* ends with the slightest hint of triumph, *American Hunger*'s first line—"My first glimpse of the flat black stretches of Chicago depressed and dismayed me, mocked my fantasies"—squelches this optimism. Seen from this angle, Wright seems a more essential and searching writer, though his proper place in the canon of American literature is still unsettled.

On the eve of his departure for Europe, Wright longed for a new, more creative self. As Rowley states it: "He was no longer categorized as a Communist, and he hoped he would no longer be categorized as a 'Negro.' He wanted to be a human being—a citizen of the world." Although he lived for thirteen years in exile, and dabbled in haiku, existentialism, and sociology, Wright never liberated himself from the rage that fired his imagination. In his last work, *Eight Men*, he returned to the realistic style and impassioned voice for which he'd been lauded. It received some of his best reviews ever. Was this triumph, or capitulation? Sadly, *Richard Wright: The Life and Times* gives us no basis on which to judge, contenting itself with providing an uninspired if solid account of a central but poorly appreciated American artist.

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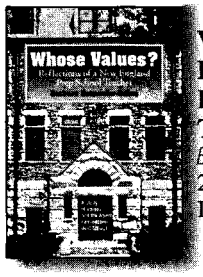

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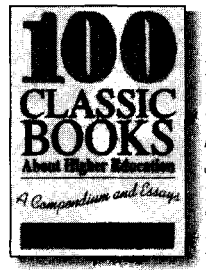

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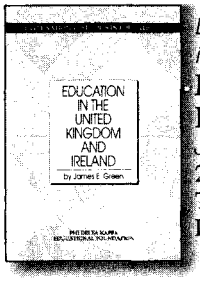

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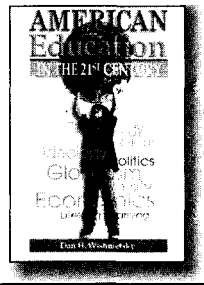

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The Whisper of the Day

AFFAIRS OF HONOR: NATIONAL POLITICS IN THE NEW REPUBLIC
By Joanne B. Freeman.
Yale University Press. $29.95.

Reviewed by **ANDREW BURSTEIN**

A slew of popular historians have gone on tour in recent years with their speculative psychodramas about the American founders. Joanne B. Freeman puts them all to shame. In her probing book, there are no heroes, no villains—only politicians. They exist on the scale on which their peers saw and judged them. They are masterful, mean, and mortal. They are operatives. Above all, they are consumed by anxious, lifelong struggles to establish and sustain reputations as men of honor.

The central figures are once again Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, but getting at the "truth" requires moving beyond the big names and probing the curious lives and emotion-filled writings of less featured players in whose hands lay the power to make and destroy reputations. We read the testimony of Pennsylvania's Senator William Maclay, New Hampshire's William Plumer, South Carolinian Pierce Butler, and a number of other defenders and betrayers. This is a "great man" study that, for once, understands that America began not as a government of heroes but as "a machine already in motion," as Freeman puts it, a federal constitution without an instruction guide.

How can we comprehend the emotionalism of early American politics from so great a distance as the twenty-first century? People responded differently from the way we do now to perceived social problems, because their fundamental expectations were different. They witnessed frequent early death, hiding their pain behind a stoical exterior. Information meant something different, too: they committed heartfelt thoughts to paper, writing letters that were destined to make their way slowly to recipients, if they got there at all. Sometimes they expected a letter to be passed from friend to friend; other times they expected secrecy to be maintained. Under these trying conditions, personal loyalty and political alliances weighed more heavily, perhaps, than they do now.

Freeman's goal is to pierce through the dense fog of rhetoric, invective, and bombast produced by American political leaders, in order to isolate the way they dealt with a volatile society. The key to their conduct lies, she says, in the "culture of honor." Codes of behavior that she uncovers in letters, newspapers, pamphlets, memoirs, and self-conscious partisan histories make sense out of the seemingly senseless recourse to dueling, explaining, for instance, why most "affairs of honor" were resolved without loss of life. The author charts how words were deployed in such circumstances, and social insecurities were unselfconsciously exposed, before ritual performances were finally enacted. In this manner, Burr's sensational slaying of Hamilton fits into the unique moral system that encompassed both republican honor and American manhood.

Affairs of Honor dissects the scrappy quarrels that constituted "the tug-of-war for political power" between 1789 and 1809—twenty years of "slander, poison, whispers, and fame," to borrow from a chapter title. Words were weapons. Just as politicians circulated their published oratory, they wielded words in the forlorn hope of being thought of by peers (and posterity) as principled, unselfish, and dependable. Oddly, given today's still generally homogenized view of the proud founding fathers, not one of the "great men" grew old satisfied that his reputation remained intact.

Capable but dangerously insecure men staked everything on their ability to convince others of their moral consistency. How else could James Monroe, as the somewhat reclusive Jefferson's political hatchet man in the late 1790s, think out loud about the way to deal with an insult leveled at him by John Adams? A duel was out of the question, he concluded, because Adams was "an old man & the Presi-

Andrew Burstein is Professor of History and co-holder of the Mary Frances Barnard Chair at the University of Tulsa. He is the author, most recently, of *America's Jubilee: How in 1826 a Generation Remembered 50 Years of Independence.*

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dent"—but what is remarkable is that Monroe could even contemplate such an option.

Americans constantly repeated the ingrained belief that their new nation was morally superior to the rest of the world—an asylum for the downtrodden, the singular home of liberty. They called themselves reasonable, yet their self-proclaimed sentimental genius as a people coexisted with habits of violence that make no sense anymore. National figures "strutted in fine clothes" and wore ceremonial swords, pretending to be grand. Inside, the same sort of men worried that because of something they said, someone somewhere might call them liars.

William Maclay kept a journal of the first years of the U.S. Senate. He describes not eloquence but disorder: members writing letters, eating cake, conversing with colleagues, wandering around instead of remaining in their seats taking care of the people's business. Some, like Pierce Butler, might "explode" with an objection at the slightest provocation. George Washington himself was known for temper tantrums. Adams was vain, Madison unapproachable, Hamilton nicknamed "his Holiness" for his insufferable arrogance. Members of the U.S. Senate seemed intent on one thing above all: voting themselves larger salaries so that they could maintain lifestyles suited to their station.

America's first politicians spoke of "plots," "intriguers," and "cabals." Yet they expressed shock and dismay when they looked around and saw that they were dividing into factions. What animated them was, in a word, gossip. Political intelligence often came in the form of "the whisper of the day." From the metaphorical darkness oozed "malicious intrigues," designed, in the politics of personal reputation, to destroy carefully built-up careers. Newspaper pieces featured clever pseudonyms, so that gossip could be spread without endangering the defamer. Private letters were often published—sometimes with and sometimes without the consent of the writer. When the tough talk, the insinuations, the non-denial denials—in Freeman's term, "paper weapons"—are fully catalogued, the result is a profound picture of personality politics unlike anything historians of early America have produced before.

There is only one anomaly in this forceful analysis: Burr. Freeman herself titles a section

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"The Enigma of Aaron Burr," for he has long puzzled historians. She strives to make sense of his actions by casting them in terms of honor. This is a useful and revealing point of departure. But the "culture of honor," as a rational set of rules shared by elite politicians, cannot explain every feature of partisan politics, owing to the very conditions Freeman has exposed: honor is unbalanced, disturbed, by irrational gossip, which takes on a life of its own once the non-elite, patronage-seeking journalists of her book disseminate it to the mass of citizens.

We just do not know what to make of all the gossip about Burr. In fact, the allegedly unprincipled campaigner espoused some rather admirable republican political principles. He vocally opposed the Federalists' punitive, nativist Alien and Sedition Acts. As New York State Attorney General, he developed a reform program that would have limited capital punishment. But because he did not take the same pains that Jefferson, Adams, and others did to fashion their moral legacies, he comes down through history only as a schemer and an adventurer.

Who among the ardent gossipers, pamphleteers, and professed truth seekers of the era is to be believed? That is the wonderfully ambitious question that Joanne Freeman dares to consider. This hard-hitting, fast-paced, comprehensively researched book is one of the most intelligent and innovative studies in early American political culture to have appeared in recent years. Its value is its immersion in archival sources and its examination of long overlooked causes, which bring out the behind-the-scenes conduct of politics in altogether new ways. The author has decoded a complex language, and in doing so adds much to our knowledge of the origins of partisan wrangling.

Affairs of Honor is a welcome antidote to Hollywood history. It dwarfs the one-sided works by poetic patriots intent on worshiping the founders. It counters the popular treatments by psychobiographers who imagine historical figures as akin to sex-starved celebrities—and who, to quote from the author's Note on Method, "psychoanalyze their subjects in a historical vacuum." It recognizes the dangers of attaching modern assumptions to eighteenth-century hearts and minds, and next to it, many narrowly conceived stories about the past are likely to appear tiresome.

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Jack Hannah in ***You Will Not Taste Death: Jesus and Epicureanism*** recognizes the notes as chronologically ordered and correlative with the skeletal history used in the *Gospel of Mark*. He provides all the text of *Thomas* with comments and Marcan context, thereby retrieving a narrative of Jesus that is tenably historical.

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THE READER REPLIES

LOVING AND HATING SIMONE WEIL

After reading Francine du Plessix Gray's article (Summer 2001), I too did not find much to love about poor Simone Weil. One odd thing, however: the opinion that aroused the author's "deepest hostility" was the very one that I thought was entirely sensible—namely, her attitude toward self-definition.

It's hard to imagine Ms. Weil trying to talk sense to the Nazis—but it *was* sense. The interchange was doomed from the start, however, because her idea of a Jew was not the same as their idea. She was talking substance, they were talking ancestry.

Since the very beginning, all comers to our shores have been under pressure to assimilate. While some groups have been criticized for assimilating "not enough," I do not understand how one can criticize others for assimilating "too much." Presumably, if someone has jettisoned whatever ancestral features Ms. Gray feels should have been retained, he has "over-assimilated." More to the point, he has also "over-assimilated" if he is now no longer recognizable as "foreign." Although Ms. Gray seems to disagree, I believe that people have a perfect right to be indifferent to their "heritage."

I believe that Ms. Gray is correct in stressing that Simone Weil was anti-Judaic rather than anti-Semitic. Although originating as an important element in Christian doctrine, and thus widespread throughout the former "Christendom," anti-Semitism has now only the slightest connection to Judaism as a religion. Like racism, it is a form of communal xenophobia, and although usually quite mild, it is, like other phobias, impervious to reason or to life experience. In order to be identifiable as "foreign," the targets have to be distinguishable in one way or another, and even the most trivial criteria may be called into action. When all else fails, ancestry becomes the last resort. It functions beautifully to lump people together who have absolutely nothing else in common in order that a ready-made (usually derogatory) stereotype may be inflicted on them. Such people are no longer permitted the luxury of self-definition.

Once a minority group becomes completely assimilated, the only way to distinguish it is through lineage. And, in fact, as Jews have become less adherent to their religion and abandoned the characteristic dress, language, and manners of their forebears (and conversely, as other Jewish ethnic features have become mainstream), the only foolproof way to identify them is through ancestry—which leads us back to the issue of "over-assimilation" and why it may be resented.

Recognizing that a low level of xenophobia is generally acceptable (e.g. *l'anti-semitisme du salon*), and may be so ingrained as to go unrecognized by the holder, I was nevertheless saddened to find how often Ms. Gray referred to "Simone Weil's people," or simply "her people"—meaning the Jews. Evidently Ms. Gray herself defines Jews simply by ancestry, exactly the same criterion used by the Nazis.

STEPHEN SILVER
Waterford, Connecticut

OHIO STATES

As a Connecticut Yankee who has spent the last sixteen years in Ohio, I found Jeffrey Hammond's "Ohio States" disconcerting in that it confirmed all of my worst suspicions about my adopted home. The Ohio-born poet Paul Zimmer said it best during a reading at Ohio Northern University (no relation

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to Ohio State) when he quoted a line from someone else's poem: "Dear Lord, when I die, please don't let me be from Ohio."

CLAUDE CLAYTON SMITH
Ada, Ohio

VAN

Early on in "Van," Brian Doyle lists some of those whose music electrified Morrison and his chums "down by the pylons" of their youth.

Before there was Jerry Lee or Elvis—and well before Morrison's passionate journey—I regaled my buddies down by the mailbox with my own renderings of the music of some of those on Doyle's list. And of Bessie Smith as well.

So let me pick a bit of a nit.

The singer Doyle calls "Joyce White" was probably, given the list's context, *Josh* White, a street-singer bluesman family-man lover of women turned cat-slick nightclub performer, whose soul was tempered early when, at the age of ten, he witnessed the lynching and burning of two black men in Georgia.

White working-class young have long heard the power of the music of black America—the sound of freedom and liberation in the face of oppression. Van Morrison heard it big time. That he sees the extension of that, the music labeled rock and roll, as "meant to be a meditative experience," takes the music further into the realm of poetry and story. Brian Doyle sees this, too, and expresses it in his essay better than anyone else has, to my knowledge.

Doyle's final scene of Morrison on the Columbia River will ring long in memory, "like it's coming from across a lake."

DAVID JOHN ZAIDO
Webster, Massachusetts

I enjoyed Brian Doyle's appreciation of Van Morrison. However, I believe Mr. Doyle misquotes Van Morrison's lyrics at least once and possibly twice.

The first is the opening quotation, which is from the song "One Irish Rover." The lyric is quoted as "Don't make me older." In the lyric book (included with the CD) and the song, it's "Don't make me over."

The second is the repeated phrase "I want to lose myself," which Mr. Doyle quotes from live performances. It's possible that Van Morrison sang that line when Mr. Doyle saw him, but on his live album *A Night in San Francisco*, and when I saw him at the Civic Opera House in Chicago in 1993, I believe he sang, "I don't want to lose myself."

These are small quibbles about an otherwise entertaining article, a pleasant antidote to all the undeserved paeans to Bob Dylan I've been seeing lately, and a reminder that a singer/songwriter can stay vital and interesting well into middle age.

LEVI T. STAHL
Chicago, Illinois

Brian Doyle replies: David Zaido may be right about the Whites, Joyce and Josh. I found the name in a list of influences that Mr. Morrison rattled off hurriedly to an interviewer, and Mr. Morrison is a famously hurried interviewee.

Levi Stahl is right to suspect that I heard Mr. Morrison change his printed lyrics when performing them live; in fact, his edited couplet "Tell me the facts real straight / Don't make me older" stayed in my mind for a long time as a pithy koan, and was one of the seeds that became the essay in question.

THE COME AS YOU ARE NOT PARTY

I was struck by Natalia Singer's account of one woman's struggle with the moral challenge of abortion. Apparently our narrator's decision to seek an abortion went smoothly until she arrived at the clinic, where she had an unexpected confrontation with "something resembling God."

Fortunately, the god of the clinic was not a dreary, Dostoyevskian god but a sort of New Age, drive-through god, offering a Happy Meal of instant absolution. All our narrator had to do was acknowledge (for the first time, she says) that she was carrying a living creature. Then she had to make nice with the little tyke (but hurry—Mommy's already in the stirrups and time is short!) by asking "her unborn child to feel the love I would have had for it even as I said good-bye." Then, in apparent response to this display of maternal concern, our narrator felt "a whoosh of

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love that warmed me from my tangled hair to my feet, which dangled from the cold metal stirrups." What's more (yes, there's more!), she had an epiphany—a "feeling that all of us—people, trees, lake, mosquitoes, agnostics, and fundamentalists—were part of the same enterprise."

So that's it. All of us—bugs, Jerry Falwell, soon-to-be-dead-fetuses—we're all in this together. And I used to think the abortion issue was complicated.

Actually, I guess I still think so. I don't care for the fanatics on either side of the abortion debate, and I would not presume to trivialize the experience of any woman who faces this lonely choice. Apparently, some women can do that all by themselves.

CHARLES H. KENNEDY
Oakton, Virginia

Natalia Singer replies: My colleagues who teach literary theory would say that the writer is the last person to ask about what he or she is up to in any given work, but I was nonetheless surprised to learn that Mr. Kennedy thought my essay was an "account of one woman's struggle with the moral challenge of abortion." Other people have mined that particular terrain thoroughly and I would not presume to have anything new to contribute there. My intention in the piece was to expose the hidden affinities between seemingly disparate, even opposing spiritual/religious influences in the culture and in my personal life, circa 1981: holier-than-thou, right-wing Christian Republicans, rigid, rule-driven factions of the New Age, and, of course, as ever, my mother. I was interested in exploring how they all seemed to be in the business of monitoring and restricting women's freedom. Mr. Kennedy seems to have missed the point of the recurring motif of doubling throughout the essay which functions (apparently too subtly) as a critique of folks who, whatever their politics, forget that indeed we *are* all in this together. If Mr. Kennedy wants to dismiss one of the basic tenets of both Christianity and Buddhism as a New Age Happy Meal, that's his prerogative, but it seems a little too clever, and makes me wonder what really lies behind his contempt.

TROPING THROUGH PROVERBIA

I greatly enjoyed Bert O. States's article on proverbs. Nothing that follows detracts from my appreciation.

First, "Easy come, easy go" is usually addressed to wastrels. "Waste not, want not" does not contradict it—it supplements the first statement. Next, although "The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices, make instruments to plague us" is in contradiction to "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods," the next statement about the gods being just is itself a contradiction, as can be seen if the word "pleasant" is omitted. It is not a statement about justice but an ironical comment that turns on itself.

Finally, as many must have pointed out, you cannot get the circumference of a circle by using πr^2. That formula gives you the *area* of a circle.

ROBERT H. HAINES
New York, New York

Bert O. States replies: I thank Mr. Haines, one of many readers who have so kindly pointed out my error regarding πr^2. I don't feel quite as embarrassed as the space scientists who recently confused centimeters and inches. But as the Book of Proverbs tells us, "Ignorance of the law excuses no man."

This, however, is only a thin slice of the pi problem. Consider: in 1948 a very generous instructor at Penn State passed me out of the basic math requirement with a course average way south of the D-minus cutoff. This act of kindness made it possible for me to get my degree(s), meet the woman I married, raise a family, pursue a livelihood teaching beautiful falsehoods, and go on, late in life, to write an article on proverbs, which inadvertently carried the youthful secret of both my fortune and my flaw. The wheel, as they say in the tragedies, has come full circle—but in my case, alas, that's no longer just a metaphor.

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Grants for Research in the Collections of the Rockefeller Archive Center

The Rockefeller Archive Center, a division of The Rockefeller University, invites applications for four distinct competitive grant programs for the year 2002. Please call or write the Center, or go to the Center's Web site for further information and application materials.

A program of **Grants for Travel to and Research at the Rockefeller Archive Center** makes grants of up to $2,500 to U.S. and Canadian researchers and up to $3,000 to researchers from other countries in any discipline, usually to graduate students or post-doctoral scholars, who are engaged in research that requires use of the collections at the Center. The Center's collections include the records of the Rockefeller family, the Rockefeller Foundation, The Rockefeller University, and other philanthropies and associated individuals. For the year 2002 the Center also will continue its special program of grants-in-aid in the **History of the Cold War Era.** Applications are invited for research on the background of the Cold War, the development of Cold War policy and strategy, and the cultural and intellectual context of the Cold War, as documented in the records maintained at the Archive Center. Relevant collections include the archives of the Rockefeller Foundation, the Population Council, the Social Science Research Council, and the Rockefeller Brothers Fund, especially the Fund's Special Studies Project. Also pertinent are the papers of Nelson A. Rockefeller (1908–1979), the papers of John D. Rockefeller III (1906–1978), and the records of the Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller, which document the philanthropy of John D. Rockefeller, Jr. (1874–1960). Potential subjects include, but are not limited to, the funding of communications studies; promotion of studies of the strategic position of the United States at the mid-twentieth century; the development of the Foreign Policy Association; a variety of specific grants made in the post–World War II period for studies of American foreign policy and civil society; the end of colonialism; and Nelson Rockefeller's and John D. Rockefeller III's governmental and personal activities in Latin America and Asia. The Center also supports short-term research in the **Paul Ehrlich Collection**, the largest and most important body of original and facsimile materials documenting the life and scientific-medical research program of Nobel Laureate Paul Ehrlich (1854–1915). Certain documents are available in English translations. Prospective applicants are urged to contact the Center with an initial description of the intended research, so that the Center's staff can help determine the extent of related materials. Applicants for the Ehrlich program will use the forms, adhere to funding limits, and follow the procedures of the Center's general grant-in-aid program. Applications may be made at any time, and, if judged worthy, awards will be made within a month of the receipt of applications.

In addition to the three grant programs described above, the Rockefeller Archive Center will continue a five-year program of residencies for research at the Center on topics related to the **History of Basic Medical Research**, a subject richly represented in the archival collections at the Center. The history of basic medical research is defined broadly to include most aspects of the history of The Rockefeller University (founded as the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research in 1901), much of the history of the international medical, public health, and scientific research programs of the Rockefeller Foundation, and major elements of the histories of the Commonwealth Fund, Culpeper Foundation, Markey Trust, and Markle Foundation. Certain segments of the Rockefeller family archives also document the history of basic medical research, such as the founding and support of research institutions. As a group, the archives of these institutions are an outstanding resource for the study of the history of basic medical research in the twentieth century.

Scholars conducting substantial research in any aspect of the history of basic medical research are urged to apply. Prospective researchers may apply for residencies of one month, one semester ($4^{1/2}$ months), or an academic year (9 months). Stipends at the rate of $5,000 per month will be awarded to cover all travel, food and lodging, and research expenses associated with the residency. Applications will be reviewed in a competitive process, and it is expected that a total of two to six awards will be made in each year during the five-year program. *Please request a specific application for a residency in the History of Basic Medical Research.*

The deadline for the receipt of all grant applications is November 30, 2001; grant recipients will be announced in March 2002. Inquiries about the programs and requests for applications should be addressed to: Darwin H. Stapleton, Executive Director, Rockefeller Archive Center, 15 Dayton Avenue, Sleepy Hollow, New York 10591-1598, USA. Telephone: (914) 631-4505; Fax: (914) 631-6017; e-mail: archive@mail.rockefeller.edu.

The grant application and guides to the Rockefeller Archive Center's collections can be found on the World Wide Web at: **http://www.rockefeller.edu/archive.ctr**

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The Podium

"Are You Doing Any Poetry With Them?"

SEAMUS HEANEY

I began teaching in the early 1960s in St. Thomas's School in the Ballymurphy area of Belfast, in front of a class of disaffected adolescent boys, many of whom would end up a decade later as active members of the Provisional IRA. There was plenty to make them shy away from poetry: peer pressure, the macho conventions of the playground, a working-class unease in face of anything that smacked of middle-class pretension—but even so, the mystery of the thing interested them. And regularly, ritually, rewardingly, the mystery was enforced.

About once a week, the headmaster of the school would suddenly appear in the classroom door. Mr. McLaverty was meant to be in his office, administering, but instead he prowled the corridors in his tweed suit and polished brogues, seeking whom he might interrupt in order to get in a bit of the actual schoolmastering that he missed so much. "Mr. Heaney," he would say, "are they working hard for you?" "Yes, Mr. McLaverty," I would answer. "And are you doing any poetry with them?" he would ask. "Of course I am," I would reply. And then, most earnestly, he would enquire, "Mr. Heaney, when you look at the photograph of a rugby team in the newspaper, don't you always know immediately from the look of the players' faces which ones of them have studied poetry?" And dutifully, unfailingly, I would answer, "Yes, Mr. McLaverty."

Mr. McLaverty could get away with his proposition that poetry changed people perceptibly for the better only because I was ready to connive with him. And anyhow, the boys in the class knew that the whole thing was a masquerade. But it is precisely this masquerade of fictions and ironies that can draw us out and bring us close to ourselves—"the luck of verbal playing," as Auden called it, that can trick us into truth. The paradox of the arts is that they are all made up, and yet they allow us to get at the reality of who and what we are, or might be. If it is a mistake to expect them to do too much, it is a worse mistake to expect them to do too little.

—from the Inaugural Darcy O'Brien Memorial Lecture, University of Tulsa, April 25, 2001

Seamus Heaney won the 1995 Nobel Prize in Literature.

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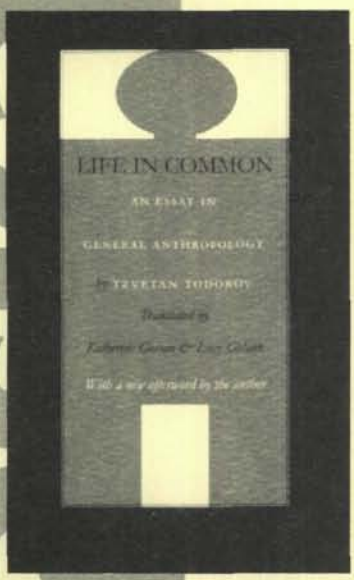

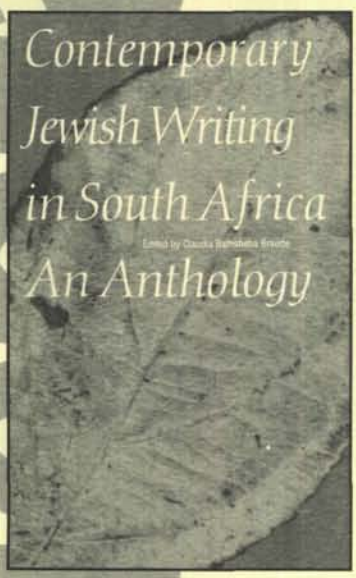

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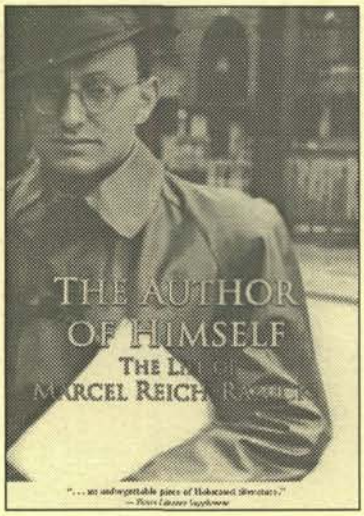

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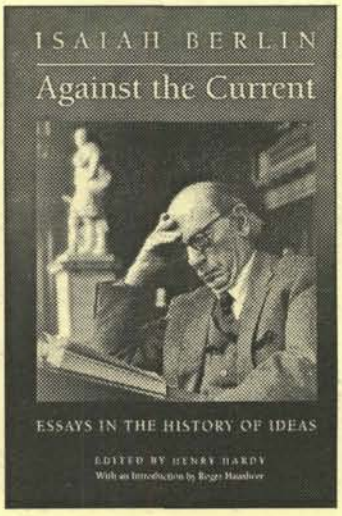

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